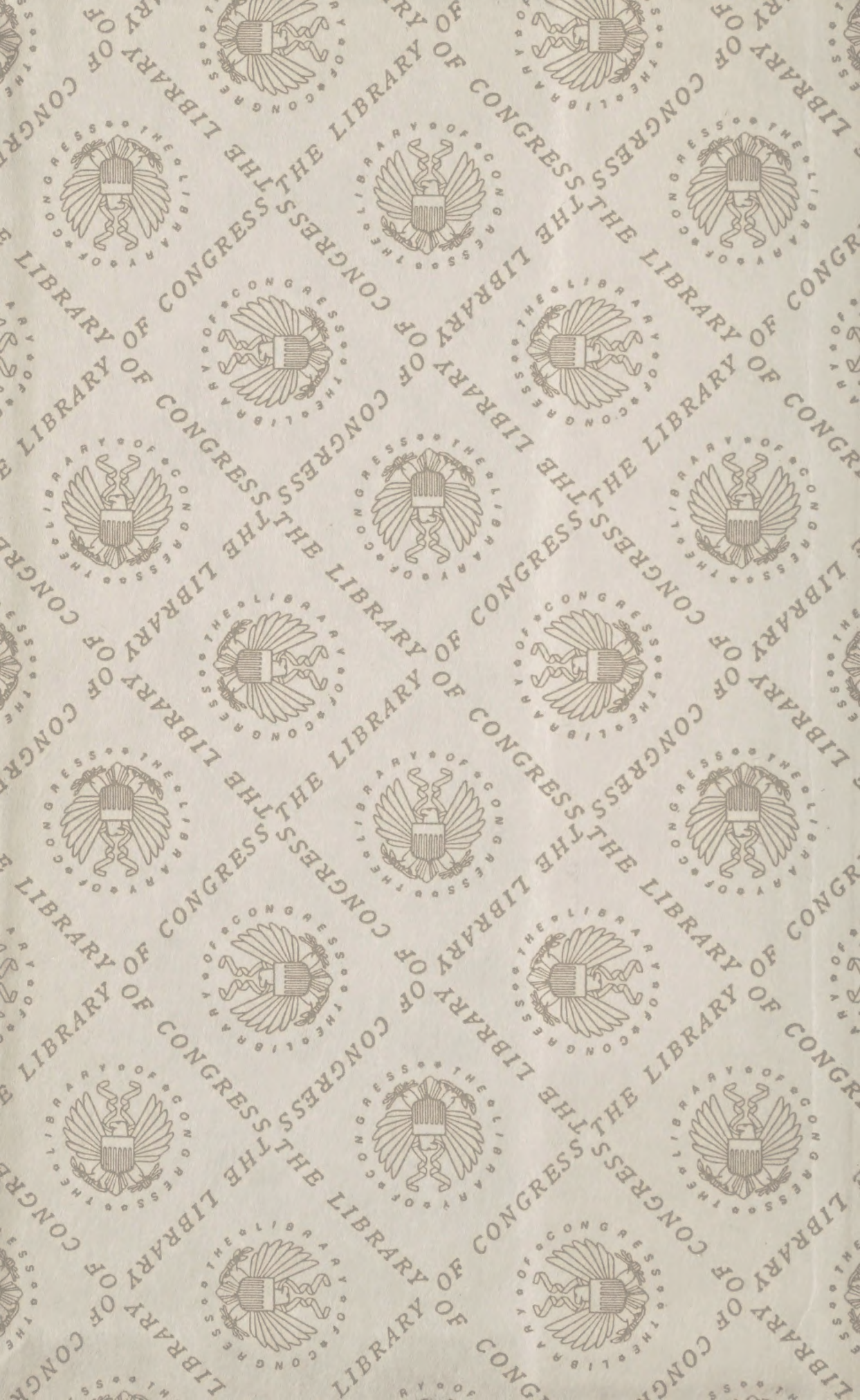
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TULIP PLACE

A Story of New York

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BY VIRGINIA W. JOHNSON
AUTHOR OF
"THE NEPTUNE VASE" "TWO OLD CATS" "THE CATSKILL FAIRIES" ETC.

"*The many fail: the one succeeds.*"—TENNYSON

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TULIP PLACE.

CHAPTER I.

TULIP PLACE.

"The wave is breaking on the shore,
The echo fading from the chime;
Again the shadow moveth o'er
The dial plate of time."—WHITTIER.

IN the city of New York there is a street known as Tulip Place. The residents of this favored locality are few, and, for the fluctuating population of a large town, unusually permanent.

Tulip Place is situated on the east side, yet so near the thoroughfare of Broadway as to be redeemed from the imputation of isolation in an unfashionable quarter. Left behind, as it were, in the tide of growth rolling ever onward to the extreme limits of Manhattan Island, the spot cannot be designated as "down-town," since it occupies a medium position between extremes, in keeping with the natural conservatism of the original owners of the property.

The envious may sneer at the pretensions of Tulip Place, hovering on the boundary, meanwhile; for the block thus designated, and inserted between a neighboring square and an avenue, has an atmosphere of gentility and tranquil seclusion all its own.

Fame of a quite particular sort attached to Tulip Place at the date of which we write, for the St. Nicholas family still dwelt there, while the spacious mansion of Donald Belt occupied the opposite corner.

Equipages of a sober and correct elegance paused before one door, and glittering four-in-hand coaches awakened the echoes to rein up before the other entrance. Dignified old gentlemen sought number Five on foot, on occasion, intent on the interests of the latest meeting of historical society or charitable institution. Shabby pedestrians slouched against the railings, at all hours, hands thrust in empty pockets, boots past the cobbler's art of mending, raiment frayed and worn, like the wearer, to gaze at number Ten, with the weary and wistful eyes of the disappointed emigrant, the cynicism

of the ruined speculator, the sullen rage of the thriftless vagabond, fascinated by the contemplation of the rich man's prosperity, even as the spent gambler hangs hungrily on the successful play of another on the *tapis-vert.*

In the veins of the St. Nicholas family coursed the purest blood of the earliest settlers of the land, whether Dutch, English, or Huguenot.

The fortune of Donald Belt had been evolved from that useful modern invention, the domestic sewing-machine.

Hence the double fame enjoyed by Tulip Place.

The town still laughed over the jest, grown a trifle stale in the lapse of time, with the broad irony and petty malice inherent in all communities, of how Donald Belt, two-and-twenty years earlier, had bought the property on Tulip Place, through the medium of a business agent, and thus forced himself, in all his new and brazen splendor, on the august seclusion of this quiet spot, hitherto sacred to the tradition of refinement, education, and gentle birth rather than the modern spirit of vulgar ostentation, too often inseparable from hopeless ill-breeding. At that date the residents, albeit peaceable citizens, would have risen to a man, and kept the obnoxious intruder at a distance, presenting a phase of republicanism as puzzling to the foreigner, capable of discerning only a level of common interests in American life, as a distant shore first appears to the ship's company in the offing, without just estimate of those heights and valleys of distinction separating the millionaire from his neighbors.

To the contemplative mind Tulip Place possesses a history, such as every street enjoys, of which each house, with the joys of domestic peace and the tragedy of family ruin and discord, furnishes a page. Sedate merchant, plump banker, and prosperous lawyer had skated, in the enjoyment of a clerk's holiday, over the flooded meadows of this portion of the St. Nicholas land. Time was when the family manor had stood here, stored with memories of Dutch governors, English officers of the garrison of New York, Hessian nobles, and French patriots—graceful and accomplished personages in powdered wigs and lace ruffles, who projected Utopian states while delicately manipulating the pinch of snuff taken from gold and silver boxes.

Old Mrs. St. Nicholas still dreamed of the past of the street, in the soft and interminable reveries of age, while her fingers guided the ivory knitting-needles in the task of weaving together tinted wools.

There was the Church of St. Jerome, expanded from the early colonial structure, with its square pews, high pulpit, and faded hassock, to pinnacle and belfry—where rang melodious chimes—rich

memorial windows, and surpliced choristers; changes wrought by that zealous parishioner, Donald Belt, of sewing-machine fame.

There were numbers Eight and Twelve, solid and wholesome mansions, whose founders being dead, their frivolous and degenerate descendants had taken flight to regions farther up-town, suffering the paternal roof to be converted into select boarding-houses. These establishments might be the most expensive and fashionable of their class, yet Mrs. St. Nicholas could not forgive the giddy votaries of extravagance who had deserted the hearthstones of their fathers for the substitution of slips of houses on wide thoroughfares.

In light and shadow stood number Fourteen, where the children were growing from flaxen-haired infancy to budding youth, and the pale, anxious face of the mother appeared at the window, a watcher, attracted by a sound, or a fancied resemblance, and awakened to swift, agonizing expectation of waiting for one who never returned. At nine o'clock on a winter's night the young husband had taken up his hat and gone forth to purchase an evening journal at the nearest news-stand on Broadway, and since that date he had not been seen by mortal. Tulip Place had been thrilled by the mystery, and chilled by the grief of the wife. "What becomes of the men who disappear from the surface of great towns?" old Mrs. St. Nicholas would muse, recalling the painful details of that time, the exploration of sinful and dark labyrinths by the detective skill of the police, the plumbing of slimy depths of wharf and bridge, the feverish activity of the telegraph, seeking, questioning, hinting at crime, disgrace, and folly. "Women are not often spirited away in the same stealthy fashion, unless some silly chit of a girl is abducted."

In light and shadow stood number Seven, where violence had come with the thief in the night, as if mocking at the seeming security of a peaceful neighborhood, and the strong man had been found in the dawn stretched stark and stiff on the threshold of his chamber, smitten down with a blow, his papers scattered, and his safe rifled of gold and bonds. Fast lapsing to the doubtful borderland of a haunted house was number Seven, with closed shutters and shrouded corridors, where lurked the stain of some unexpiated crime; a hollow shell, robbed of lawful inmate, and the widow, a stern woman, swathed in crape, holding vigilantly the key, even as she kept guard on her own pale, resolute lips; her time devoted to religion and charity.

The modern burglar, usually known in America as a London thief, had not failed to pay his respects to Tulip Place in more adroit and harmless guise. Had he not visited number Two in daylight, disguised as a woman, and spirited away, as if by magic, Mrs. Nu-

gent's diamond rings, silver teaspoons, India shawl, and a velvet gown or so? Did not more than one neighbor consult a clairvoyant, on the occasion, with curious inquiries respecting these missing articles, and receive the most varied, not to say perplexing, information in response?

Mrs. St. Nicholas, alone, pondered on these matters: the harvest of good and evil which had visited her street in the manifold experiences of life.

The busy world of the town, having attended service on Sundays and saints' days at the Church of St. Jerome, recalled Tulip Place only as the abode of the rising man, Donald Belt, and the St. Nicholas family. Nay, if the truth be confessed concerning a degenerate age, Donald Belt was rapidly acquiring precedence of importance in public estimation. An upstart, an intruder, who had gained possession of the land on which his house was built by resorting to a trick most unbecoming in a gentleman, the street could only take refuge in not knowing him, and otherwise rendering him uncomfortable by the small social slights to which, as a human being, he would be vulnerable. Mr. Jacob St. Nicholas had never enjoyed the pleasure of an acquaintance with Donald Belt, and Tulip Place followed this lead. The rector of St. Jerome, a mild and peace-loving old man, much perplexed by the hostile attitude of the parish, and the most judicious course to pursue as regarded a new member desirous of embellishing the tabernacle from his own private purse, had departed this life, leaving the unsolved problem to a younger and more energetic pastor, and the latter had not hesitated to accept chimes and choral appointments from the millionaire.

Mr. St. Nicholas had smiled his most sarcastic smile, and rubbed his delicate white hands together with a movement which betrayed not wholly repressed irritation. It is further on record that while retaining his place in the vestry, in order to conscientiously oppose and indirectly thwart any measure proposed by the new man to that body, he stared coldly at the intruder beyond the limits of such council, and subsequently remarked, "Sewing-machines must be in demand."

Why should the *parvenu* intrude where he was not wanted? Let him seek one of the wide avenues, the new streets, where his class may bask in all the ostentation of unaccustomed wealth. Thus Tulip Place had reasoned, with the same petulance and cruelty which often falls to the lot of a new pupil in a school.

Donald Belt would have none of the locations to which he was unceremoniously assigned, and just in proportion as he was not wanted had he coveted residence on Tulip Place. He was a resolute man, capable of making his own way. If society had not, at

the outset, affixed the seal of a capricious approval to his name he was determined to win consideration in good time. In addition, the town witticisms appertaining to the sewing-machine were wholly misplaced, yet must ever cling to him, like a burr, teasing, irritating, and unworthy of notice. Donald Belt was a banker, and knew less of the mechanism of wheel, shuttle, and lock-stitch than his neighbors. Possibly the weakness of having the raiment of his household invariably hand-made furnished the scornful with an additional weapon wherewith to sting.

Joseph Belt, the father, had, in a humble and industrious youth, combined one of those labor-saving inventions which, spurning the drudgery of human fingers, have undoubtedly left idle the workers. These perplexing and philanthropical considerations had not deterred the quick-witted and clear-headed mechanic of frugal life, and although he had speedily converted his earnings into other channels of shrewd investment, the sewing-machine remained attached to his own name and that of his descendants in proportion as his riches increased.

Tulip Place and the town sat in judgment, grasping conclusions without too closely analyzing their substance.

Donald Belt, banker and millionaire, must ever be designated as the sewing-machine man, even as the flavor of chocolate, employed in a disparaging sense, adheres to the princely magnificence of a certain private hotel of Paris, the stimulating qualities of vermouth have become inseparable to the exquisite toilets of a stately beauty of Turin, the virtues of an invalid-beverage lend lustre to the dowry of three sisters in London society, and the soothing effects of a cough-syrup are extolled at Florence in connection with villa, theatre, and palace building. Why the inventions, compounds, and elixirs, projected for the good of mankind, should serve as a term of reproach for the supercilious and the impecunious, must remain one of the mysterious phases of the human mind. The noble of Ferrara, nurtured on the fairy lore of Boiardo, and the measures of Ariosto, in the trim little capital set amidst the fertile corn-fields and terrace-vines, may still smile, by right of his own chivalrous lineage, at the descendant of wool-spinners in the Tuscan Athens, or Roman titles.

Tulip Place was prepared to doff the hat to the mine-holder, speculator, or dealer in iron, on a gigantic scale, while disdaining a certain spacious mansion on an adjacent thoroughfare as having been built of pins, or a passing equipage, with yellow wheels and conspicuous liveries, as owing its origin to crinoline.

The name of Donald Belt must remain united to the sewing-machine, and who can determine if some future fame may not fall

to his portion as obscure as that attaching to Dick of the queer hat-band, Betty Martin, or Jack Robinson?

"O vain world's glory and unsteadfast state
Of all that lives on face of sinful earth."

The years passed, and the seasons brought their changes to Tulip Place. Spring blossomed in the square beyond, where the fountain glistened in the sunshine, the babies played, and the sparrows built their nests in the Gothic cottages, assigned them, by an enlightened municipality, among the branches of the trees; summer smote the town with sultry heat; autumn decked even the curbstone with the transient glories of gold and crimson foliage; winter fringed every spout and gutter with crystals of icicle.

The face of the watcher at the window of number Fourteen grew more wan and set, while the children throve and laughed. Door and casement of number Seven, of haunting memories, defied the years to wrest from its walls the terrible secret of a dark night's work. Donald Belt held his ground, evinced no disposition to pull down his barns and build greater elsewhere, and expanded, as it were, in the sunshine of prosperity.

Old Mrs. St. Nicholas, journal or knitting in hand, pondered on these matters. A younger generation ignored them, intent on the hopes and pleasures of to-day.

On the eighteenth of December, in the year 18—, morning dawned crisp and clear on Tulip Place. Mr. St. Nicholas opened the window of his library to consult a thermometer suspended on a hook of the shutter, according to his habit, and having satisfied himself as to the exact temperature of the past night, withdrew his white head swiftly.

The hangings of satin and lace were separated, and Camilla Belt gazed forth on the street from one of the casements of number Ten.

"I am twenty-one years of age, to-day," proclaimed the girl, triumphantly, as she stood there in her *peignoir* of velvet, which caught the light in the varying tints of amber and brown of a pheasant's plumage, while the creamy, yellow folds of the curtains remained gathered about her. "That means I am very, very rich, oh, city of Gotham; and you know the value of money, do you not, my dear fellow-townsmen? No! I did not mean you, sir."

This reservation was addressed to the opposite St. Nicholas mansion, where a second curtain had been pushed aside for the occupant of the chamber to glance out, in turn. A tall man, with a certain easy grace of carriage in keeping with a fine head, covered with curling brown hair, and the good-humored smile of an undeniable handsome face confronted Camilla. A large man, with serviceable hands

and feet, and broad, muscular shoulders, he betrayed by the very fashion in which he thrust his fingers into the pockets of his plush morning-coat that indolent indifference to trifles, promising a latent reserve of power for emergencies, such as leads the mastiff and Lithuanian hound to pass by snarling curs, disdaining the gage of battle; a man at peace with himself and the world, prepared to live to-day as he did yesterday, comfortably and with all due tranquillity, undisturbed by the fever of soaring ambition, and not too much interested in his fellow-creatures.

"I am thirty-five years old to-day," mused William St. Nicholas. By Jove! I begin to feel old, already."

A sudden blush suffused the face of Camilla Belt. The presence of her opposite neighbor was a distinct grievance, at the moment, and checked her exultation. On awakening she had experienced the joy of a mortal who holds the brimming cup of happiness. The Greeks best characterized this climax of earthly felicity in the summary—to be young, healthy, rich, and able to enjoy the hours with one's friends. She loved her father with an instinctive loyalty of affection, she was on good terms with her stepmother, and she possessed hosts of friends—chirping, caressing maidens—and decorous youth ready to obey her slightest bidding in the park, or to hold her bouquet at a ball. The world was before the girl in the robe of iridescent velvet, shrouded in the amber lace of the window. She was free to go and come, to choose and cast aside. This new-born sense of power thrilled her with intoxicating pride. She commenced to build air-castles and dream roseate visions in harmony with her years. Then William St. Nicholas must needs look out of the opposite window, as if to warn her of the limit of vanity, the subjects she could not hope to claim, the lives, gentle, well-bred, remote, on whom her sway would have no influence. Camilla's flexible brows met in a ready frown. "No! I did not mean you, sir!" she repeated aloud, half ashamed of her delight in the possession of her fortune of ten millions of dollars, inherited by her, on this day, from her grandfather, Joseph Belt. "What is mere money to a St. Nicholas? Money that first began to spin with a sewing-machine, besides. The thread of the first shuttle must have been pure gold. A pretty fancy! A golden thread, woven through all these years, for me to reel off at pleasure. Poor grandfather! You might have spent more on your own comfort without harm to your unworthy descendant. See! We were both born on the eighteenth of December, Mr. St. Nicholas, with the difference that you had some fourteen years the advantage of me. I am told that, as a boy, you had the curiosity to come and look at me, so astonished were you that I ventured to take such a liberty as to enter the world on your day. There is a tradition in

the humble home of Belt, cherished especially by the old nurse, that you patted my cheek when you met me in the street, on subsequent occasions, until snubbed by your parents."

The pair continued to gaze at each other across the street, without exchanging a salutation, yet moved by the same thought, in acknowledgment of a link of mutual interest which existed between them, independent of their respective position.

The frown faded, and yielded to an expression of humorous perplexity on the features of the heiress, which were mobile and expressive rather than beautiful. Given the accessories of creamy lace hangings, and the rich *peignoir*, Camilla Belt was a fine-looking girl; shorn of such plumage she would have passed unnoticed in the crowd as plain. She held a Longfellow Birthday-book in her hand, and turned to the date of the eighteenth of December. She read:

"'Tis nature's plan
The child should grow into the man."

She accepted this line as applicable to Mr. St. Nicholas, then sought her own destiny, cast in the same poetical mould:

"There all are equal. Side by side
The poor man and the son of pride
Lie calm and still."

Camilla had recently returned from a sojourn of two years' duration in Europe, where she had acquired a varied experience, and yet, confronted once more by the plain and sober mansion over the way, the old feelings of resentment, repulsion, and attraction reasserted sway. Why did the St. Nicholas household not wish to know and receive her? She might pass them in the throngs of society, outstrip and eclipse them by every means of modern display before the public gaze, and, while they quietly avoided collision, she would inevitably be made to feel that she was not such as they were, the well-born.

"Will mademoiselle take her chocolate here?" inquired a sweet voice, in French.

"Yes," said the heiress, abruptly, and turned away from the casement.

"I have arranged the birthday-cards on a little table, mademoiselle," pursued the sweet voice, which had caressing intonations.

Camilla placed her hand on the speaker's shoulder and kissed her on both cheeks.

"You are an angel, and always think of everything at the right moment," she retorted. "How did I ever manage to live without you, *ma mie?*"

The companion thus addressed flushed beneath her habitual olive pallor, and made a deprecatory gesture. She was very small and

slight, with glossy dark hair becomingly arranged on the crown of her head, and her neat black dress of a severe simplicity, relieved by immaculate linen collar and cuffs, in marked contrast with the lavish magnificence surrounding her. Aimée Rauvier, latest toy of the capricious Camilla, had been attached to her retinue as modest confidante, to create a French atmosphere in the family, write notes to her dressmaker at Paris for Mrs. Belt, and conciliate, as best she could, the instinctive hostility of the servants to one in her position.

Camilla seated herself at the table, and was served with a cup of foaming chocolate on a tray of Nymphenburg porcelain, whereon each picture of château, fountain, and hunting-lodge reminded her of an autumn day spent amidst the parterres and alleys of the Bavarian Versailles. The draperies of the doorways revealed a suite of six rooms, adapted to the use of the daughter of the house, and embellished according to her own caprice of the hour. The ceiling was given a low rather than lofty effect by means of elaborate frescoing, while the walls were decorated to simulate ancient stamped leather, with panels of tapestry at the four corners. Chandeliers of Venetian glass wreathed their pale flower-garlands about the clustering tapers, and lamps of iron or brass filigree swung on massive chains from every cornice, or poised, in classical shape, on brackets, screens, cabinets, and fragile tables, freighted with trifles of jade-stone, enamel, crystal, and bronze; albums of photographs, and portfolios of water-color drawings and proof engravings inspired an intruder with that sentiment of discomfort, in the dread of crushing, overturning, and breaking the brittle treasures of a museum, inseparable to the prevailing taste for profusion in ornamentation.

Plaques of embossed metal and of richly colored majolica were grouped on the walls. Pictures of Moorish maidens, half screened behind the lattice, and dusky Arab warriors enveloped in white burnooses, spear in hand, on the easels draped with Oriental tissues, shot with gold thread and cabalistic symbol, lent their glowing life to this interior. An evening on the Nile, the Pyramids glowing in the setting sun, against a golden sky, found reflection in the summer tempest of an Alpine pass, with a solitary wayfarer driven forward by sleet and wind, while the awful doom of threatening avalanche hung poised above his head.

The India matting of the floor was covered with rugs of Ispahan, Teheran, Kermanshah, Mecca, or Madras, subdued in tint, yet with velvet reflections of surpassing beauty. *Portières* of Syria and Karamania mingled their red, yellow, and green hues with the stuffs of Diarbekir. A true praying carpet from Dughestan was beneath Camilla's foot as she sipped her chocolate. A second of Kurdestan

served as a favorite couch for her dog. Donald Belt's daughter had brought together Arabia, Turkey, and Persia, in her nook of the great house on Tulip Place, and the whim pleased her.

The entrance door, heavily draped in the Eastern stuffs, was guarded on either side by a complete suit of mail, superb in workmanship, which might have been worn by some knight of a mediæval tournament. These were Camilla's men-at-arms, and her feminine visitors were wont to utter little shrieks of rapture at sight of their helmets and breastplates.

"These paladins make one feel so dreadfully modern and upstart!" cried the ladies.

"Yes, they are lovely and old," Camilla would respond. "We are *new*, you know, and must make the best of it. As Artemus Ward once said to the Englishwoman, 'in our unhappy country we have no Tower.'"

Then she had attached a white rose to the cuirass of one sentinel, and a red bud to that of the other, grouping on the opposite wall shields and weapons to give them suitable countenance—halberd and lance, the flexible Malay kriss with hilt of carved ivory, Turkish poniard set with precious stones, a Damascus blade with sentences from the Koran engraved on the steel, daggers with handles of onyx, silver, and pearl; an historical pistol or two, and a sheaf of Toledo rapiers adjusted like the spokes of a wheel.

The atmosphere was warm and redolent of mingled perfumes, as if the occupant had massed jasmine and heliotrope in the jars of Hizen porcelain on the chimney-piece, covered with gold-wrought damask, rifled from Italian sacristies, and swept aside with a spray of peacock's plumes from brass andirons and screen of the hearth; burned a stick of sandalwood before the Chinese idol in his pagoda shrine, and wafted incense from the chalice of silver lamps swaying before a Madonna and Child of terra-cotta, in the Della Robbia school, sheltered by palm-fronds in an alcove.

Why did the chocolate in the Nymphenburg cup lack the accustomed flavor? Camilla could not banish the image of the opposite house from her mind, with the son lounging in an easy attitude at the window. The sight stung her to active hostility, as in petulant earlier youth and unreasonable childhood. She was surprised and discountenanced by the keen resentment of her own feelings. She believed she had wholly outgrown her wrath at the St. Nicholas pretensions of superiority. Travel in Europe and the East had widened her horizon and matured her estimate of humanity. Tulip Place, with its petty differences, had contracted to the narrow limit of a street. The progress of the Belt household through foreign lands had been one of triumph. In the London drawing-room, the

Paris *salon*, the Roman *palazzo*, Camilla had been received as the representative American heiress, her fortune acquiring fabulous proportions as estimated by French or Italian tongues, just as Donald Belt was the representative American citizen and parent. Travel had reassured Camilla, while similar experience must have tended to teach a St. Nicholas individual insignificance in the great world beyond Manhattan Island. Indignation and doubt once more smote her on returning to her native land, with William St. Nicholas contemplating her, indolently, from the opposite casement.

"I suppose he finds even my velvet robe ridiculous—mere vulgar ostentation," she reflected, angrily. "No doubt the St. Nicholas ladies wear linsey-woolsey of a morning, as in better taste."

Mademoiselle Aimée contemplated her patroness with a certain wistful curiosity, the naïve interest of a girl of another sphere, endowed with the instinctive love of luxury of a young cat fond of soft cushions and cream.

"The case of mirrors from France has arrived," she announced.

Camilla shrugged her shoulders with a movement of indifference.

"I don't care for more mirrors, after all," she said, absently, and pursuing her own train of reflection rather than considering her companion.

"Not care for them," echoed Aimée, clasping her hands together, with a little gasp of wonder.

"We might pave the floor with gold, *mignonne*, and set the walls with precious stones. How would you like that for a fine effect?" pursued Camilla, in a tone of banter.

Aimée accepted the proposition with all possible gravity, a shadow on her piquant face.

"If you wish it," she rejoined, meditatively. "It must be wonderful, incredible, to be so rich."

Camilla looked at her keenly, for a moment, contracting her eyebrows, and then turned to the table of birthday-cards.

Congratulations had been showered upon the only daughter of Donald Belt, couched in many tongues, and every variety of graceful design; German knights in mediæval costume pledging her health in a gilded goblet; birds winging their way over delicately tinted seas; tiny fans fluttering their greetings; flowers blooming on satin, ivory, and porcelain, and enclosing in the inevitable spray of forget-me-not souvenirs of rhyme and scene.

The recipient glanced at them with indifference and tossed them over, reserving a few. The first of these was a slender envelope sealed with a crest, and having a foreign postmark. On the enclosed card a margin of cherub heads, portrayed by a skilful pencil, served as a frame for this verse, in Italian:

DECEMBER'S CHILD.

"O beauty, born in winter's night,
Born in the month of spotless snow;
Your face is like a rose so bright,
Your mother may be proud of you!
She may be proud, lady of love,
Such sunlight shines her house above;
She may be proud, lady of heaven,
Such sunlight to her home is given."

The initials A. S. were inscribed in one corner, while on the reverse a second design of the clever amateur gave the faint and evanescent suggestion of ruined aqueduct and temple, broken statues set amidst stone-pines, and a cluster of domes visible against the horizon.

"Roma!" murmured Camilla, softly, and the imperial city wooed her, with an infinite suggestiveness, even in the careless lines of the drawing.

"Roma! Italia!" she repeated, and all the latent sentimentality of the Anglo-Saxon, Teuton, and Slavonian woman awoke in her nature, at the mere words, the intoxication of the Northern temperament, prepared to idealize the present race, imbued with a traditional and classical enthusiasm by poet, historian, and painter.

What untold mischief they sow and reap, these credulous, gentle, and ardent women partisans of the children of the sunny South, clothing manifold imperfection in imaginary virtues! The noble English lady gossips graciously, in stiff French and doubtful Italian, with the *garçon* who serves her at the Continental hotel table, as she would never dream of chatting with butler and footman at home; the romantic German quotes Goethe and Schiller to the musician, and speedily hearkens to a new melody; the mystical and emotional Russian becomes enthralled with the magnetic power of the tragedian, and the serious American occasionally discerns virtues hitherto undiscovered by others in the *cameriere* deputed by fate to dust the furnished apartment where she dwells. Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso still live to these strangers, with the mist of sunshine in their eyes, and the sparkling waves of a blue sea at their feet. Each statesman is a Cavour or a Massimo d' Azeglio in their judgment, and every nobleman a Gino Capponi. Thus the tide ebbs and flows; other maidens will be born, other matrons beam, other spinsters yield to unsuspected tremors as long as there exists an Italy to be explored afresh and a people to be improved, aided, and caressed.

The second card was a tiny etching of Lake Windermere, enclosed in a vellum envelope, with the salutation appended, in a firm handwriting: "With best wishes of Vincent Ashwell."

Camilla laughed. No idle reverie stole over her at sight of Windermere.

"Fancy a learned man turning aside from the study of mastodon and fossil shell to remember my birthday!" she exclaimed.

Her fingers trifled with an eccentric design of a sphinx on a blue background, with the name appended of Crosbie Ellery King.

"So I am the sphinx, the unsolved riddle of womanhood, Colonel King?" mocked Camilla. "You had better give up the study, sir. And here is Captain Rawdon, with a basket of violets. No, I have not forgotten the dance on board the flagship at Villefranche, and the merry days at the Nice carnival, when the car of Grasse took the prize, perfumery promising to outlive the waning corn, oil, and wine harvests of the land. What have we here? The card of the Marquis Roger de Martinet. A charming gentleman, with faultless manners, truly, haunting the Riviera, prepared to fulfil the Frenchman's code of seeking Nice to amuse himself, Mentone to die, and Cannes to get married. You made me your best bow, monsieur, urged on by your zealous family. It is a pity your reputation should be unfavorable, as a deep player at the Cercle de la Mediterranée and the Cercle Nautique, my friend."

The simplicity and elegance of this last missive rendered her thoughtful. Once more her glance reverted to the St. Nicholas mansion opposite, visible through the casement.

"We are not good enough for you, but monsieur the marquis notices us," she mused, with a little nod of defiance in the direction of the Mordecai in her gate. "I do not object to giving you a crumb out of my abundance, though, Mr. St. Nicholas."

She selected a little book of pink plush, and wrote across the spray of lilies on the page:

"One-and-twenty salutes five-and-thirty.

December 18, 18—. C. B."

In the meanwhile William St. Nicholas had idly twisted his watch-chain, for a moment, and hummed a strain from a popular opera, while his eye was attracted by the radiant figure of Camilla, slender and erect, in her *peignoir* of velvet.

"Yes; I remember very well when you were born, Miss Belt," he said aloud, as if in response to her mutinous glance. "You were a droll little atom of humanity in the nurse's arms, and I am bound to say you have grown up a handsome young woman. Fine feathers certainly do make fine birds in this wicked world. Well! I wish every girl in the city of New York had a velvet gown like that."

With the utterance of this philanthropic sentiment, fresh from the bath, and the modicum of sleep which suffices for the nervous system of the town-bred man, he joined his family at breakfast.

Mr. St. Nicholas, a tall and thin old gentleman, with white hair, aquiline face smoothly shaven, except for a margin of gray whisker on either cheek, sharp blue eyes, and irritable brows, was seated at the head of the table, in the act of breaking a soft-boiled egg into a china basin of cooked hominy. Such was the invariable first repast of a citizen well known for the soundness of his digestion and the excellence of his judgment in all matters appertaining to the kitchen and the wine-cellar. Conservative in religion and politics, devoid of the fibre which constitutes modern reformers, in any field, fond of society abroad, and his library and tulips at home, Mr. St. Nicholas had been pronounced, on occasion, by an envious dyspeptic, a double turretted, iron-clad monitor as regarded turtle soup and lobster salad.

Mrs. St. Nicholas, seated opposite and intrenched behind silver urn and steaming milk-jugs, was a tall and thin old lady, wearing a false front of uncompromising blackness, and having a dark and pinched face of severe expression, with a bluish tip to a long nose, and puckering wrinkles beneath the small and suspicious eyes. Always plain of feature, with a reddish-brown complexion, the profile of Mrs. St. Nicholas had acquired, in old age, a human resemblance to certain birds of the parrot tribe.

Such similarity may often be traced between man and his humble relatives of the animal kingdom.

The plainness of Mrs. St. Nicholas had not prevented her husband from ranking as an admirer of feminine beauty, and a gallantry of bearing suggestive of the old school of flowery courtesy.

Their daughter, Mrs. Monteith, a pale and slender woman, with the family features too strongly accentuated for beauty, occupied one side of the table, with her son Willy, while the vacant space opposite still awaited the remaining member of the household.

The dining-room, in common with the rest of the house, had an atmosphere of comfort which was old-fashioned. Polished mahogany and carved oak were more in harmony with this interior than ebony, buhl, or mosaic.

William St. Nicholas strolled into the room, with his hands still in the pockets of his plush coat. "Nobody has remembered that my birthday falls on the eighteenth of December," was his airy greeting.

"A letter, sir," said a servant, promptly, and presented the large envelope despatched across the street by Camilla Belt.

"You darling boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Monteith. "We have not forgotten, and the proof of it is that I am going to coax you to escort me out to-night."

"Anything but that, Alice," said the brother, examining the envelope with some surprise. "Where are you going this evening?"

"To the Whiteby ball, and you are just as good as you can be, Willy—"

"Halt! My dancing days are over, Alice, and I am not a marrying man."

"The Whitebys are very good people," remarked Mrs. St. Nicholas, spying into a cream-pitcher. "They are descendants of one of the first governors of Maryland."

"I thought you were about to state, mamma, that the four Misses Whiteby came in with the Conqueror," said the son, employing his knife to sever the envelope, as he took his place at table.

Willy, the younger, laughed.

"They must be jolly old by this time," he supplemented, maliciously.

Mrs. St. Nicholas set down the cream-pot.

"The William of our family is not a marrying man," she announced, with mingled triumph and regret. "I wished our boy christened Humphrey or Jefferson, for that very reason, but your grandpapa would have his own way in the matter."

"I mean to marry," asserted Willy, the younger, smoothing the golden down on his lip.

Mr. St. Nicholas put on his eyeglass, peered at the envelope, and inquired, in a dry tone,

"What have you got there?"

Camilla's souvenir, the booklet of pink plush, circulated around the table.

William St. Nicholas was amused, even interested.

"You see we have the same birthday," he explained, half vexed that he had opened the envelope there.

"Ah!" observed his father.

"Indeed!" echoed his mother, with a bridling movement of the head.

Mrs. Monteith was silent, and stole a furtive glance at her brother through her drooping eyelashes.

"Mammon has returned from Europe more than ever like the frog in the fable, I suppose," said Mr. St. Nicholas, in his most sarcastic manner.

Mammon was the title by which Donald Belt was known in the domestic circle of his neighbors.

"The daughter comes in for ten millions from her grandfather on her twenty-first birthday," added Mrs. Monteith, pensively nibbling a morsel of toast. "Do you know, papa, I fear we must bury the hatchet and leave cards immediately."

"Why?" demanded Mr. St. Nicholas, sharply.

Even now he could not forgive Donald Belt for building his big house on Tulip Place.

"It will be so very awkward to meet them everywhere. We shall go to the wall, with our modest purse, before Miss Belt's ten millions," pursued the daughter.

"I should like to visit Mammon's stables," said Willy, the younger, with the fatal facility of adaptation of his years and his century. The youth wore a blue necktie, fastened with a scarfpin combining a jockey's cap in gold and a silver whip.

"Miss Belt should espouse a king in exile, at the very least," quoth William St. Nicholas, helping himself to potted tongue. "You might do worse than leave a card, Alice. She looks like a nice girl enough, and they say the sewing-machine man has lavished no end of money on her education."

Mr. St. Nicholas pursed up his lips and stroked his chin. Mrs. St. Nicholas sighed because of the evil times she had lived to behold. She knew that her daughter would have her own way, even as she banished, from day to day, some antique household relic to be replaced with pretty, frivolous *bibelots*.

"Young people are no longer particular in the selection of their associates," she said, in a stately tone. "No wonder the tone of society is lowered."

"The safest plan is to know every one," replied Mrs. Monteith, speaking with a slight drawl. "Willy, if I take this step will you support me?"

"Yes," was the indifferent rejoinder.

"Very good! When Miss Belt gives a ball you will go, provided we are invited," she added, artlessly.

"Invited!" repeated Mr. St. Nicholas, in a high key.

"You will dance with Miss Belt, Willy, although your dancing days are over?"

He smiled without denial or assent.

"Really, my dear, you are fast settling into a slothful bachelor," said Mrs. Monteith, lightly. "Confess that you have an engagement to-night to drink beer in some horrid garden, with a lot of Germans. Providence intended you for the leader of an orchestra, and not a man about town. You are never the slightest use to me on my Tuesdays."

"Not I," chuckled the slothful bachelor in question. "Take care, Mrs. Monteith, that your perpetual tea-drinking does not lead you to fly off on some tangent of the nerves like the votaries of Russian pilgrimages."

"I hope the originator of days, kettledrums, at homes has reached

the same place of just punishment as the inventor of the pianoforte," said Mr. St. Nicholas, quitting the table. "I used to enjoy a cosey chat and a friendly call at certain houses, where I flatter myself I was welcome. Now there is a rush there once a week to drink sloppy tea and eat bonbons. Nobody enjoys it, and nobody says anything. Even the hostess has a distracted fashion of making her visitors thoroughly uncomfortable by dragging them about, interrupting conversation, should a man find his tongue, by chance, and introducing the wrong people."

The daughter bent her head meekly before the storm. All the world thronged to Mrs. Monteith's Tuesdays.

"What's the color of Miss Belt's seal, uncle?" interposed Willy Monteith, making a seasonable diversion. "A fellow told me what it all means, the other day. Red is business, of course; black, mourning; white, weddings; blue, a love letter; pink, complimentary— By Jingo! it is pink, uncle."

"Once there was a man," said William, the elder, finishing his matitudinal cup of coffee.

"Well?" questioned the nephew, eagerly.

"Ah! I thought your eyes would begin to sparkle, youngster, at the prospect of a story. You have not been out of the nursery so long, after all. Once there was a man, and his name was François Rousseau. He had been a traveller in Persia, Pegu, and the East Indies. Consult your French history, child, and see if he did not flourish somewhere about the end of the fifteenth century. Well, he lost all his worldly goods in a great fire at Paris, and, having a wife and five children to support, bethought him of preparing the first sealing-wax used in Europe. A fashionable dame presented him at court, and he earned fifty thousand livres in a year. Imagine the sewing-machine man introduced to the French king with his invention under his arm, instead of Monsieur Rousseau with his stick of sealing-wax. Times change. Did you think the tale was to be about Jack and the Bean Stalk?"

"Perhaps I am not such a flat as I look," grumbled Willy, with boyish vexation.

"No; I do not believe you are such a flat as you look," retorted Uncle William, with quiet significance.

"Sometimes it is well to be as much of a flat as one looks," hinted grandfather.

Willy flushed to the roots of his blond hair at these allusions to the escapades of a New York school-boy and collegian of Columbia College.

"You shall not tease my boy," said the fond mother. "Heap coals of fire on his head by giving your uncle the birthday-gift."

Willy presented a tortoise-shell cigar-case to his uncle, while his mother added an embroidered tobacco-pouch, all her own work, as she warmly asseverated.

Mrs. St. Nicholas produced a curious box, and disclosed an antique watch.

"Take it, my dear, only do not permit a loan collection to have it," she said.

"This is too much, mamma," exclaimed the dutiful son, whose reverence for relics was, in reality, of the smallest.

The watch was encased in silver and blue enamel, with a cipher on the cover, while the face was protected by convex and transparent horn instead of the later modification of crystal. Mrs. St. Nicholas liked to believe this heirloom had once belonged to Queen Mary, and been bequeathed to one of her faithful maids of honor.

Mr. St. Nicholas then opened the large prayer-book, and read the Psalter of the day, according to the family custom.

Two hours later Camilla Belt was contemplating the string of pearls, of faultless lustre and unusual size, given to her by her father, and the flounces of lace bestowed by her stepmother. Mademoiselle Aimée had added, with pretty deprecation, her own humble offering in a box painted with a delicate design of the Château of Chillon, enclosed in Alpine wild flowers.

A basket was brought Camilla wherein twenty-one cream-colored rosebuds nestled amidst ferns and moss. The accompanying card read:

"Five-and-thirty salutes one-and-twenty.

December 18, 18—. WILLIAM ST. NICHOLAS."

Camilla uttered a little cry of surprise, and flushed to the temples.

Mademoiselle Aimée stood near, with small, brown hands folded in an attitude of contemplation.

"He possesses *ésprit*, it seems, the American gentleman," she said, pensively.

"There is a bud for every year," said Camilla.

That evening Donald Belt's daughter slipped the bracelet she wore, a coiled serpent, over both wrists, and, thus manacled, with hands behind her back, approached the casket of amber and malachite where she had placed the birthday-cards, seeking one at hazard. The prize she drew was the Italian verse and design; she smiled, released her hands, and approached the window, resting her brow against the cold pane to gaze forth on the night.

"As well that one as another," she murmured.

Tulip Place was wrapped in shadow. The opposite house was dark, save when the movement of a shutter revealed the interior of the library, with old Mr. St. Nicholas seated in an arm-chair, his

hands resting on his knees, in an attitude of attention, while his wife read aloud an evening journal, her parrot profile in relief against the shaded lamp.

A masculine figure emerged from the door and walked away, at a brisk pace. A carriage drew up to receive the floating draperies of Mrs. Monteith, then whirled around the corner.

Camilla Belt saw these things without heeding them. She was dreaming of her own future, for the world was before her.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNT DELLA STELLA DISCOVERS AMERICA.

"The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played."—MILTON.

ON the following day, December the nineteenth, the steamship *Cristoforo Colombo* entered the harbor of New York, having on board, as passenger, Count Azzolino Della Stella, of noblest Genoese lineage, and captain in a regiment of cavalry of the Italian army.

The steamer had threaded her course from the Mediterranean ports across the ocean, with store of works of art, marble, Parmesan cheese, olive-oil, and Sicilian fruits in her hold, and such graceful human freight as the gallant officer Count Della Stella in the first cabin.

The latter was abroad, as a traveller, for the first time. He experienced the curiosity of his race, a little naïve, under the circumstances, and was prepared to believe that he discovered scenes long familiar to other nations. He had no intention of contributing descriptions of his travels to some leading journal of Milan, Turin, or Rome, nor did his ambition lead him to emulate such brilliant authors as Edmondo di Amicis in ornate volumes. He was satisfied to keep a far different aim well in view, and mature his future plans while lounging against the bulwark of the *Cristoforo Colombo* smoking rapidly consumed cigarettes. African exploration, Alpine climbing, South American enterprise of colonization did not arouse the indolent strength of his supple form, any more than the evanescent ebullitions of a Garibaldean demonstration kindled a spark of flaming patriotism in his breast. He belonged to Young Italy, inheriting, in addition, the valor of a warlike ancestry. He was prepared to equal in any battle of modern warfare three Frenchmen, and at least half a dozen Austrians.

For the rest, he might hope to command, in his own proper person, that immunity from harm enjoyed by the pilgrim of the Middle Ages who ventured along the coasts of the Aral and Caspian seas, or penetrated Turchistan and Thibet, with the passport, "I am a Genoese."

In personal appearance he was a man of attractive exterior, being slender and dapper in figure rather than majestic.

"Well made," was the discriminating, masculine verdict on his person.

"Divinely handsome," was the softer feminine opinion, too often accompanied by little flutterings of the heart and changing color, whether on the part of court lady in gala toilet for the opera, or peasant girl filling her copper pail at the fountain of her native village up among the Apennines.

Regularity of feature, a pure and colorless fairness of complexion, abundant dark hair clustering in curls on a small head, as the ringlets wave about the brows of Correggio's cherubs, hands and feet of a symmetrical elegance, were details not noticed at first by the observer, save in the suave harmony of the whole. His eyes and mustache claimed immediate attention. Nature had bestowed upon the count those dark and limpid eyes which have the tranquillity of the Neapolitan and Sicilian, and further possess a quality of expression best defined by the French as a "magnificent regard." This look, magnetic, eloquent, dominating, and of which the possessor may be unconscious, except in results, is rare: the Russian and German occasionally have it, in common with the Spaniard and Italian. The mustache was eminently characteristic of the owner. Chestnut in tint, with golden reflections, of a silky lustre and fineness, it imparted a great variety of expression to his physiognomy, now drooping about delicately chiselled, mobile lips, as if entreating permission to salute the hand, cheek, or mouth of beauty, and again bristling with a martial fierceness in the café or on the promenade. The mood of the moment was betrayed, or concealed, at pleasure, by the mustache. The soldiers and recruits under his command had instinctively learned to note if the glossy fringe of hair were jauntily twisted into a spiked point on either side of the face, like twin daggers, which might indicate a humor for conquest in the ballroom, or suffered to hang dishevelled at the drill on a raw morning, when the owner had been known to smite a blundering soldier across the mouth for some misdemeanor, although, in the main, he courted popularity, as his ancestors had done. The blow given to an inferior, the frown, the oath, might be accepted solely as an evidence that the count, born in a volcanic climate, possessed nerves of unusual susceptibility, and had lost at play the previous night, or had just been challenged by a jealous comrade under irksome circumstances.

The mustache, often caressed by the count, concealed a scar, narrow and slight, on the upper lip, which would have proved a disfigurement without the appendage. Few persons would have dared to question how the wound came to be inflicted; even the countess mother, while adoring this only son, viewed the scar with a tolerant

conviction that men will be men, and refrained from extorting confession of some probable misdeed. The mustache veiled the blemish as the vivacity of a naturally joyous temperament clothed the whole man with the glow of a brilliant vitality.

The previous season Count Azzolino Della Stella had discovered America, for the first time in his life, and the circumstance had rendered him thoughtful, not to say alert. He had now obtained leave to explore this *terra incognita*, and, shorn of the splendors of his uniform, he appeared to better advantage than most officers in the "mufti" of the citizen, while his shoulders and spine maintained a military erectness of bearing in tweed and broadcloth.

Stationed at Rome with his regiment, where he was enjoying the brief holiday of gayety accorded by a sojourn in the capital, he had met Camilla Belt at an ambassador's ball. Cynosure of all eyes, the American girl had dawned on the count, not decked in feathers and wampum, like a second Pocahontas, but surrounded by a dazzling halo of wealth so vast that the minute sands of her existence seemed to drop gold and precious gems.

He was a trifle puzzled and relieved to find that the cast of her features was European, so complete was his ignorance of the land from whence she had come, by reason of his indifference to the subject, while her toilet moved the mundane instinct of respect in one learning to discern when a woman is well-dressed, and in accordance with the latest Parisian dictates of fashion.

The countess mother, in her corner of the Genoa palace, or the villa back among the hills, where she managed the sorry remnant of estates which had descended to her keeping through the centuries of war and violence suffered by republic and city, with all the energy of a Maria Della Rovere, was sadly behind the times, in this respect; blooming in the family lace and velvet on august occasions, with purple and yellow feathers in her bonnet, only to resume dingy woollen robes in subsequent retirement.

At the ambassador's ball Camilla Belt had worn a web of lace over a petticoat of pale-blue satin, and this mesh, so marvellous in delicacy of texture, and design of fern-frond, harebell, lily, and clustering myosotis, was known to possess an historical value, having been woven in damp cellars, by human spiders, for a sovereign dethroned before the linked threads of painful toil attained completion. Camilla's hair was confined by a fillet of unique design, which formed an Etruscan diadem, each point terminating in a black pearl.

Count Della Stella recognized this diadem as a *chef d'œuvre* of modern imitation of classical workmanship in the art of jewelry, revived by Signore Castellani, and valued at some fifty thousand francs. The American had purchased the ornament, and confined

her own hair with it, with the same coolness that marked her bearing when an awkward dancer rent away a rift of her lace, or she permitted princes and dukes to inscribe their names on her tablets for successive waltzes and quadrilles. Self-assured she certainly was, with a shade of assertion perceptible in her manner, and yet no undue boldness could be ascribed to her. She had looked her partners full in the face, her carriage straightforward, even blunt, rather than embellished with any of the arts of feminine coquetry.

Donald Belt, a trifle ill at ease, in his dress-coat, amid the rustling throng of foreigners, had not appeared at equal advantage with his womenkind. He was not amused, he was even extremely bored, for after rambling through the vast emporiums of Paris, and having the celebrities of the Bois de Boulogne pointed out to him, Great Britain remained the sole country where he could feel solid ground beneath his feet, while at the ball of the ambassador unfathomable depths and treacherous eddies surrounded him. Camilla's father knew what he wanted in England, which was to push his way into the presence of the very great ones, and persuade them, under guise of his own respectful admiration, that he was such as they were.

Mrs. Belt, superb in her rare beauty, had surveyed the scene with her inscrutable, veiled eyes and faint smile, winning the approval of her hostess for her robe of amber surah and brocade, heavy with embroideries of silver and gold, paniers and bodice frilled with Renaissance lace, Watteau train attached to the shoulders, and white hair brushed over a cushion, and adorned with sprays of diamonds. The small hands of Mrs. Belt, with the fragile fingers and slender wrists, encased in creamy gloves of many buttons, had in her girlhood served at the washtub of her native village, before Donald Belt had peered under her hat brim, discerned her loveliness, and rescued her from such oblivion of obscure toil.

The scene still lingered in the memory of the Count Della Stella. He saw the state apartments of the noble old palace, where the sunshine of the Roman springtime lies warmer on the terraces, statues, and shrubbery of the adjacent gardens than on the cold and sombre Borghese, the mouldy and dilapidated Spada, or even the trim elegance of the Doria, and where every chandelier and bracket sparkled with light in honor of the night. Galleries of tapestry, rooms hung with crimson stuff, and enriched with pictures by Giulio Romano, Filippino Lippi, and Boticelli, and a hall, with the founder of the race enthroned in the apotheosis of the frescoed ceiling, and the portraits of the daughters of the house lining the walls in twin rows of pale, gray nuns or court dames, formed a fitting entrance to the grand *sala*, resplendent with constellation of crystal chandeliers, gilded cornice, column, escutcheon, and tables supporting antique

busts in the embrasure of each casement, so richly framed in the lustrous marbles resembling veined agate.

Camilla Belt, enveloped in the fleecy folds of her historical lace, with the Etruscan diadem binding her hair, mingling with the crowd of dancers on the inlaid pavement, which still reveals the furrow made by a cannon-ball, and such garnered sunshine of splendor as her stepmother's brocades, by way of background, had attracted the observation of the count, more beautiful, himself, in his graceful uniform, than the hero spurring among the rosy clouds of the frescoed ceiling.

Emulation lent an additional incentive to masculine homage. He was not the only man who sought to dance with the heiress of the West. The following day he obtained a presentation through the intervention of a court chamberlain and a foreign representative. His commander patted him on the shoulder with encouraging good-humor. At the expiration of a week he had made a formal proposal of marriage. Donald Belt was irritated, Camilla amused. The ardor with which the count pressed his suit rendered the lady doubtful of his sincerity. They arrived at the same goal by the widely diverse paths of national difference.

Offers of marriage had been showered upon the granddaughter of Joseph Belt during her triumphant progress through foreign lands, with the briefest possible space allowed for the more delicate subtilties of wooing, in the manifold phases enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxon. Landing in Sicily, she had been met by a priest, whom she had never before seen, in the interest of a nephew, a young gentleman whom this zealous kinsman could not too highly commend to her favorable consideration. Monsieur the Marquis Roger de Martinet had offered himself before acquaintance was ten days old, and after formal attentions to Mrs. Belt.

"Fortune-hunters, with pinchbeck titles, every one of 'em," Donald Belt had grumbled, deeply grounded in prejudice against fellow-creatures whose language he did not understand, and whose ways were not as his own. "If an English duke should step up, Camilla, it would be a different matter."

"English dukes may be capable of making great sacrifices in our day, but you cannot expect one to add a sewing-machine to his other quarterings," Camilla had responded, blithely.

"I wish you would not fling that thing at me when I know nothing about it myself," the parent had rejoined, with ill-humor.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the girl had retorted, kissing him on the cheek. "I owe all to the machine, though, and I do not mean to be ashamed of it."

Camilla had laughed at Count Azzolino Della Stella, when he

sighed at her coldness, but she had not wholly repulsed him. What woman could have wholly repulsed the Count Della Stella? He had bidden the family farewell only on the Alpine confines of Italy, with many passionate protests of despair, and entreaties to be remembered.

"He seems to be a good sort of fellow," admitted Donald Belt, for whom the count had been at great pains to explain the silk industry of the lake district.

"He has such beautiful manners," mused Mrs. Belt; deeply appreciative of the delicacies of an unfailing courtesy, even as the flower of an arid soil may expand under the influence of grateful moisture.

In domestic life Donald Belt was brusque, even severe, a husband of unimpeachable integrity, utterly devoid of kindness and consideration, reserving his surface politeness for the outer world. Mrs. Belt had accepted the good and the evil of her lot with the faint smile which might mean mockery or melancholy. Without the golden robe, and diamonds in her hair, given by Donald Belt, she would not have attended the ambassador's ball.

"The count quite spoils one for association with common people," Camilla added, ruminatingly.

"He is a descendant of the counts of Lavagna, of Genoa, my dear," said Mrs. Belt, with unwonted animation.

"How learned you are becoming, mamma, in all matters of descent!" exclaimed Camilla, laughing. "We will elect you family historian."

Mrs. Belt winced and became silent.

"We will return to Italy," Camilla had said to this ardent suitor, puzzled by a fervor which seemed to her practical temperament a trifle exaggerated, and yet touched by it as well. "Have we not drank of the fountain of Trevi, like all good pilgrims?"

"You will return, but when?" the gallant soldier had echoed.

Camilla had smiled and shaken her head as the train bore the family swiftly away in the direction of one of the great boundary tunnels.

"It is best not to believe all that these foreigners say," croaked Colonel Crosbie Ellery King, in the railway carriage; a sentiment approved of by Donald Belt, while arousing swift feminine hostility.

Colonel King was abroad on leave, and prepared to don his uniform and maintain the dignity of the regular army, on all occasions when such a measure would enable him to shine, in a real or fancied resemblance, to the late General Scott, in his prime. He had been presented at every European court, and attended reviews without number. A certain graceful queen had not failed to congratulate

him, in stereotyped form, on the possession of a West Point. Florid and juvenile in appearance, albeit sensitive as to reminiscences of the Mexican war, as a remote period, frequenting Carlsbad and the Hungarian mud-baths surreptitiously, Colonel King had attached himself to the Belts, with the marked difference in his conduct that he openly devoted his care to Camilla, at the expense of respectful attentions to the stepmother.

"Sincerity belongs alone to Americans, Colonel King," retorted Camilla.

Did she long remember the episode of travel? Intercourse with Count Azzolino was agreeable, if no more, and in harmony with such surroundings as drifting on Venetian lagoons, and lingering on the marble terraces of Como—wooed by the fragrance of orange groves, jasmine, and magnolia—whither he had followed her, owing to the complacency of that benevolent commander at Rome who had patted him on the shoulder.

Liszt, in 1840, beholding the vision of womanhood floating before the entranced soul, and youth, sincere in devotion, wove these united forms into the ideal love-tale on the shores of the Lake of Como.

Camilla did not believe in the Count Della Stella, and the very ardor of his suit was calculated to arouse suspicion, if not a faint repugnance, in her breast.

It has been said that the Frenchman best understands the art of talking about love, and the Italian of acting the tender passion, while the Russian is accredited with speaking and demonstrating his sentiments equally well, even as the German puts Cupid to sleep, and the Pole ruins all. The count's method was as old as Tasso, whose sonnets he could repeat, on occasion, with bewitching effect on the enchanted feminine ear.

The suitor did not forget. He set himself to acquiring the English language, with the aid of a decrepit professor. He returned to the ancestral halls and consulted the countess mother, who first embraced, and then listened to his plans. Camilla Belt had become the load-star of his destiny, and he was prepared to follow her to the ends of the earth.

The countess mother had meditated long, and consented, promising to lend her aid and counsel, with the energy which had characterized the mediæval women of her house. The noble lady further showed herself adaptative to her age.

"*Meglio dei quattrini nella borsa che un trono nell' immagiazione,*" she had murmured, seated at her casement overlooking the city of Genoa and the sea.

Her son stood beside her, twirling his mustache, and echoed the proverb.

Far back in the remote realms of tradition the counts of Lavagna had held these lands, their origin lost in the darkness of tradition, with some claim on the stock of the dukes of Burgundy and the princes of Bavaria; their rule the same Longobardic laws which governed the marquises of Savona and Ventimiglia. Forts and castles crested all the hills, sloping upward to the encircling mountains, which hold Genoa like the gem of a crown, now blooming with olives and gardens. Clash of armor then resounded where to-day the peasant prunes the vine, and the laborer draws forth slate from the caves wherewith to roof all Liguria. Wise in their day and generation were the nobles, seeking the Emperor Frederick I., when he besieged Milan, to pay their homage, and reap such profitable results of royal patronage as the right to claim broad estates and extort large revenues, to rule the duchies of Parma and Piacenza, Massa and Carrara, to buy seventy castles of the Bishop of Lodi; on occasion, to form alliances with Spain, France, and Germany in those conflicts whose aim was to thwart the enemy of the moment by calling in foreign aid. How they shone, in their baronial splendor, these Fieschi, sometime counts of Lavagna, defenders of the public liberty, now in exile at Rome, and now delivering the pontiff from captivity; with two popes, a score of cardinals, and a hundred or more archbishops and bishops selected from the race; their mission, as Guelphs, to rival the Doria and Spinola rule; their aim, ever, to grasp supreme power! Living, they built palaces on the hill of Carignano, adorned with precious marbles, statues, pictures, and frescoes, and environed by gardens blooming with rare plants, where in feasting, revelry, and the cultivation of letters, while the eye ranged over town and port, and thence along valleys and slopes towards Nervi in one direction, or sought the shores of Voltri, Albissola, and Savona, in the other, they might plot the overthrow of rivals, even as such rivals were striving to compass their own. Dying, they were wrapped in silken vestments and cloth of gold, and consigned to the family vault in the cathedral, with appropriate funeral orations. Glorious days, when German emperor, French king, and Spanish despot used Italy as a chessboard, moving the princelings about as pawns to checkmate each other. Those ancestors of Count Azzolino played their part in the drama, as parent stem, with many branches, of which he was one, until such time as Gian Luigi Fieschi, having ripened his conspiracy, perished beneath the waters of the harbor on the dark night that brought ruin to his cause, amid confused tumult in the arsenal, stormy sea, cries of galley slaves, striving vainly at their chains, and the awakening to consciousness of danger of old Andrea Doria. Bitter retribution ensued, for which the Della Stella suffered to this day, with castles bombarded, fiefs

seized, estates despoiled, palaces rased to the ground, fit to be the scene of a congress of kings, according to Madame de Staël, and the affixing of a slab of infamy to that one occupied by the mother and son. The slab of infamy did not disturb them in the least, although the countess dwelt in a mere nook of the vast residence, renting the remainder in apartment, school, office, so that the income thus derived might yield a little pin-money for the captain in garrison at Rome, and keep the villa, sole remnant of the castles of the Middle Ages, where rank weeds flourished in the neglected gardens, and daffodils grew somewhat too luxuriantly.

They were at liberty to gather together the shreds of former grandeur, to recall an ancestor who, as a Knight of Malta, was entitled to receive an annual pascal lamb, to dwell on the time when the lords of Este and Montferrato, the Gonzaga and Visconti, took wives from their house, to still make use, as they saw fit, of shrewd mottoes, rightfully appertaining to them, such as "*the world belongs to him who will take it,*" or "*nous savons bien le temps.*"

The countess was not likely to forget that her own alliance had been one of industry, the nobles having married the daughters of merchants, occasionally, after the weaving of silk became a source of opulence to the town, in that curious blending of interests when the weaver dropped shuttle and loom to grasp the sword and oar in brilliant naval enterprise, conquering Scio or Samos, then returned to the spinning which clothed his fellow-citizens in magnificent apparel, and enriched his descendants. There was even a rumor of an uncle in the oil trade, as a calling, in these evil times. Alas! Funds of the Della Stella were no longer hoarded in banks, successors of that of St. George, the first founded in Europe, on which the similar institutions of Holland and England were modelled, together with the Arabic system of notation, and the drawing of a first bill of exchango on Palermo. Evil times indeed, since the Spanish rule had nearly extinguished the germ of vitality, and repeated sieges had fallen on the walls, from the day of Louis XIV. to Masséna and General La Mamora.

The countess mother, short, fat, and yellow, with *nez rétroussé*, several double chins, and shrewd little eyes, played in that public lottery founded in 1550 by the Spaniards to pervert the plebeians, but she recognized the necessity for other and more urgent measures on the part of her son.

She had bidden him farewell with firmness, then sought a church—built in fulfilment of a vow, and as a result of pious discourtesy, when a rival faction had bidden the Della Stella erect a sanctuary for himself, if he wished to celebrate mass—to pray for the success of the present mission.

Thus had Count Della Stella discovered America. He did not sally forth attended by retainers, his steed caparisoned with orange-colored velvet, laced with vermilion, and having poitrels of silver, his plumed cap doffed to the admiring townfolk as he traversed the narrow streets of his native city. He did not weigh anchor, and steer out of the harbor in a state galley, having at the stern an angel, and at the prow spear, helmet, and shield, while standards twain caught the light on crimson damask, heavy with gold embroideries, and flags fluttered from the poop, bearing the devices of pontifical keys, chalices, and crosses, and saloon and deck might invite a bride to enter beneath pavilioned domes of tapestry, and be served by a crew in satin jackets. Still less did he put forth in a craft like that equipped for the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem at Nice, in 1530, armor-plated with lead, fastened by means of bronze pivots, manned by three hundred warriors, and having a chapel between decks. The age was changed, but did the nature of the man materially differ from the characteristics of his ancestors?

On board the steamship *Cristoforo Colombo* who so gay, patient in trifling discomfort, and good-humored as the Count Azzolino? He was ever ready to amuse himself and others, and the ship's company owed him allegiance to a man. He was *simpatico* with the captain and officers, and equally at ease with the crew, comporting himself with that charming affability which is so graceful a characteristic of his class, accepted by the poor as their due, in some sort, without cringing servility. He was attentive to the ladies, and played with the children as naturally as he discussed art with the American sculptor accompanying home his life-work, the Venus wrought of purest Carrara marble, in the hold of the vessel. He sang duets with the Neapolitan musicians—the little, round basso, the tall, melancholy harpist—prepared to win their way in the streets of New York, by means of fiddle, flute, and lazzaroni melodies. Smiles and encomiums greeted him on every side, and he wore his laurels as lightly as those young nobles who had once spurred through the narrow streets on caparisoned steed, or manned the galley of the port for conflict with Turk, Pisan, and Sicilian.

Now the voyage was over, and he leaned against the bulwark, eagerly contemplating the harbor and city of New York.

He drew from a pocket-book a card, bearing the name and address of Donald Belt, and a photograph of Camilla, attired in the historical lace dress, which he had purchased at the Roman photographer's. He gazed tenderly at the pictured face, and murmured words, as if to warm and awaken the gray shadow of womanhood to life.

Then his quick glance reverted to the wide expanse of bay, and the spires and roofs of unfamiliar shores. He saw only Camilla

Belt, transplanted and blooming in another soil. He beheld her serving as lady of honor to the Queen Margherita at the Quirinal Palace, by virtue of his own rank and her fortune. The old palace at Genoa once more banished tenants, and opened its halls to princely munificence of hospitality; the vineyards of countless hillsides owned in him once more a master. The golden days were coming back, all as the ship *Christoforo Colombo* glided into port.

At this point in his meditations the count twisted his mustache, and hummed the "Santa Lucia," perpetually strummed by the musicians of the lower deck. "Per Bacco! How cold it is in this blessed land!" he exclaimed, adjusting the furred collar of his coat. Heat and cold were alike indifferent matters to him.

CHAPTER III.

DECEMBER'S CHILD.

"*Foul, cankering rust the hidden treasure frets,*
But gold that's put to use more gold begets."—SHAKESPEARE.

CAMILLA awakened the ensuing morning with that sense of well-being only possible to the happy and the prosperous in this world. The happiness, as a purely sensuous sentiment, must be inseparable to an absence from care, equable temper and nerves, and a good digestion, and the prosperity not too closely sifted in analysis. Camilla enjoyed both gifts in their fullest measure of complete contentment. She was not beautiful; the fairies having denied her cradle the supreme grace of maidenly charm. Her complexion was brown, her features massive and irregular, her chin square. When she smiled, with flexible, fresh lips revealing large, white teeth, and a sudden lighting up of gray eyes, wholesome was a term more applicable to her personal appearance than attractive. No; she was not beautiful, stately, or imposing, but she possessed strength of purpose, will, and cleverness sufficient for half a score of maidens.

Such was the value set on herself of a young woman, now placed in an exceptional position, whose mother had faded from life after bestowing upon a beetle-browed, high-tempered child the poetical name of Camilla, as the seal of much novel and magazine reading during a sickly girlhood. Camilla had always held her own way in everything, for her stepmother had not interfered with her training, either from a sense of pride or personal deficiency.

To rest in one's bed, and drowsily contemplate the opening day, still on the borders of dreamland, is a luxury few mortals can resist, despite the warnings of King Solomon. Camilla pillowed her head still more deeply in the Malines laces of her couch, in the shadow of a blue silk canopy. She was going to live, not recklessly, but joyously. The winter should be one of perpetual gayety. Her native city was destined to behold what she, Camilla Belt, was capable of doing to keep the ball spinning right merrily.

She had read the comparison recently, of society being the great, central wheel of a system of mechanism destined to keep all minor wheels in motion, and the votaries once caught in its giddy revolutions could no more escape, except to be flung aside, crushed.

Camilla abandoned herself voluntarily to the monster wheel with a delightful sense of intoxication in perpetual motion and excitement. She tasted, in advance, the sparkling cup of coming triumph. Vanity flowered in her breast, not so much in her outward person as in the power wielded. Women rulers of all grades in life, from queens to serving-maids, have felt the same thrill of conscious supremacy and imperious desire to reign. Half-formed images and projects floated idly through her brain, like the rosy fragments of sunset clouds. Her eyelids once more fell, and she slept.

She was awakened, startled, and confused by the sound of a beautiful voice. She lifted her head and listened, heart and pulses throbbing tumultuously. The voice, mellow, persuasive, tender, had penetrated her slumber, and could only belong to the Count Della Stella. Was he calling to her? Where was he? Camilla experienced that cold shudder of apprehension to which the least imaginative are, at times, susceptible, and which stirs some faint sentiment of superstitious awe, checking, for the moment, laughter and song. Was he dead, the superb soldier of the Roman ballroom and the gentle cavalier of the Italian lakes, and some echo of his protest against fate been borne to her ear in the morning summons to sudden and acute wakefulness? Count Della Stella should never age, know sorrow, nor die. To him belonged the perennial freshness of a land old in history yet retaining the childhood of a classic era, with the blossoming of the grape, the olive, and the fig, and the treading out of the golden maize on the threshing-floor. Camilla had not thought of the count of late, amidst a crowd of varying incidents and occupations, but she rose in a more serious mood than her earlier meditations had promised, and entered the adjacent bath, which was a true temple of snowy marble, decorated according to her own whim.

The bath effectually banished the dream, and, emerging once more, her glance sought some missing object in her chamber. She had placed the porcelain bowl containing her one-and-twenty birthday roses, gift of William St. Nicholas, on a table near the window. The roses were gone. The French maid, Maria, had removed them, firm in the belief that flowers in a sleeping-room are deadly things.

"I am the best judge of that," said Camilla, and her nostrils quivered, evincing rising anger. "Bring me the roses directly."

Maria departed, and speedily returned empty handed.

"They are gone, mademoiselle! The Englishman threw them away because I had placed them outside the door. What would you have? Dear young lady! I have known a peasant in Provence to fall like one dead when all the world gathered oranges, because of the smell of the blossoms."

Camilla turned from the dressing-table, where she was seated, with her chestnut hair falling in a cloud about her shoulders, to confront the culprit.

"How dared you touch my roses!" she exclaimed. "The next time you take upon yourself to think for me I will send you back to your own country."

This threat elicited from the maid many apologies and a flood of tears. Her mistress resumed her place before the mirror, with a scornful and impatient gesture. She was unaccountably vexed by the loss of the roses. The buds forming the links of her years had not been accorded time to unfold, much less fade. Camilla had intended to watch them, muse over their fleeting perfume, perhaps press one. The stupidity and impertinence of a servant had thwarted the aim.

Two hours later, Camilla and Aimée, equipped for a morning walk, emerged from the door of number Ten Tulip Place, at the precise moment when William St. Nicholas descended the steps of number Five.

Each recoiled and hesitated, as if with the intention of avoiding a meeting, then walked on to the corner, where such an encounter would be inevitable, at the crossing. With William St. Nicholas the swerving aside was that of a man whose family ignore the person greeted, and with whom salutations must possess a tinge of constraint, especially if the one encountered be a woman.

"Good-morning, Miss Belt," he said, lifting his hat.

"Good-morning, Mr. St. Nicholas," replied Camilla, extending a well-shaped hand, encased in a gray glove, with her monogram worked on the wrist in black and silver.

He took the hand, thinking:

"She was far more radiant up at her window in the velvet gown, than on the street. Distance lends enchantment to most objects, women included."

Camilla, glancing up at him in turn, made the swift, mental comment of an impulsive and large nature—

"He has a nice, sensible face. Yes, he is absolutely handsome. I could like him if he were not a St. Nicholas."

Aloud, his speech was sufficiently courteous:

"I have to thank you for remembering my birthday, and that it occurs at the same date as your own."

Aloud, her response was equally correct:

"How kind of you to send me the roses! The chaplet of my years charmed us, I assure you, only I had scarcely had time to admire the buds before my stupid maid threw them away."

"*Ciel!*" exclaimed Aimée, in involuntary dismay.

"I believe you, *chérie!*" retorted Camilla, in French, and waxing wroth over the recollection. "The creature had an idea the perfume would make my head ache. She knew a peasant in Provence who fainted from the fumes of orange blossoms."

William St. Nicholas raised his eyebrows.

"How deeply rooted is human prejudice," he rejoined, easily. "Less horror of flower scents, and a more lively susceptibility to graver evils, might have spared the Latin races some visitations of plague and pestilence."

Camilla smiled suddenly and brightly on him. She had not intended to be betrayed into a confidence over the lost roses, but having yielded to the whim, as a girl ever prone to say what she thought, a pleasant warmth resulted in the conviction that she had found a friend on the curbstone.

"Good-bye," she said, in a tone of amiability, the more surprising that the cap of old Mrs. St. Nicholas was plainly visible at the window of the library, while the aquiline profile of Mr. St. Nicholas projected from another casement, ostensibly to test the thermometer, swinging on its hook, but, in reality, to spy out the land in the direction of the young people at the corner.

"Good-bye," he echoed. "*Au revoir, mademoiselle.*"

"Are many Americans like him?" inquired Aimée, as the two pursued their way.

"Yes; plenty," said Camilla, with decision. "Why do you ask, *mignonne?*"

"I should call him *gentilhomme.* He has a certain *je ne sais quoi* —you understand. Ah, mademoiselle, he resembles our *Genevois* of the *haute cité,*" cried Aimée, with sudden enthusiasm.

"Truly," said Camilla, in the tone of banter she often adopted with her pretty companion. "Now we are making a pilgrimage to a certain shrine. Oh, you need not look so serious. I do not intend to shock your prejudices, you little daughter of Calvin. We are pilgrims, although we wear no silver shell on our hats, and carry neither staff nor wallet."

She spoke lightly, and her purpose in bending her steps to the west side of the town was scarcely more serious. The freshness of the morning, with a blue sky and radiant sunshine, induced exercise in healthy frames.

Camilla turned in the direction of the Hudson River, for the first time since her return from Europe. A cold wind swept in from the sea, and cakes of ice ground in heavy, opaque masses against the wharves.

Mademoiselle Aimée, full of curiosity, yet patiently awaiting the confidences she felt assured were welling up to the lips of her com-

panion, buttoned her furred jacket more closely, and thrust her little hands into the sable muff, recent gift of Camilla. Cold had no terrors for the Swiss maiden, accustomed to the *bise* whistling down the valley of the Arve, or gathering fresh power on the flanks of Mont Blanc.

Patroness and companion crossed the traffic of several intersecting avenues, while the length of street stretching before them gradually changed from twin rows of brown-stone houses, uniform in height and architecture, to shabby brick tenements, with occasional gaps of vacant lots, or the dreary length of vast factories, jetting forth smoke from lofty chimneys, and humming with the vibration of machinery imprisoned within the walls.

At length Camilla paused, and glanced about her as if unfamiliar with the spot.

"How the place has changed since I last saw it," she mused, aloud.

The river was now full in sight, a gray and turbid volume of water, ice-blocked, here and there, with a margin of distant trees that seemed to shiver in the wind. Nearer at hand was all the unsightly *débris* of the water-frontage of a large city, extending from the shipping, adjacent lumber-yards, and depots of railway materials to the manufactories and fringe of brick houses. A pianoforte factory occupied one side of the street.

Camilla inspected this building a moment, then slowly skirted the entire square in the rear, avoiding pools of muddy water, heaps of dust, and crowds of children at play in the gutters.

Aimée followed in silence; she inferred that Camilla was seeking the house of some poor person with a claim on her charity.

But Camilla did not enter any of the narrow doors on the two avenues or the street, but returned once more to the point of departure in front of the pianoforte factory.

She accosted a young woman who emerged from a small house on the corner.

"Do you live here? Am I right in telling this lady that we are on the Belt property?"

The young woman paused and reflected before replying, briefly,

"This is the Belt property."

"I thought so, and yet how changed it is," said Camilla, pursuing her own train of reflections.

"Everything changes!" retorted the young woman.

The bitterness and defiance of her tone startled both of her listeners. She was gone the next instant, leaving the memory of a pale, earnest face, resolute in expression, with lips compressed and head lowered, as if to meet the keen wind sweeping in from the sea.

At this moment William St. Nicholas approached at a quick pace,

and, without recognizing either of the ladies, ran up the steps of one of the opposite houses, inserted a latch-key in the door, and entered.

What was he doing here? Camilla mechanically scanned the house, which was of insignificant, even dilapidated, exterior, with green blinds to the windows.

"Why should he come over here, too?" she soliloquized.

"Perhaps it is his home," suggested Aimée, to whom the noise, confusion, and dirt of the quarter, remote from Tulip Place, merely suggested another phase of town life.

"Oh, no," rejoined Camilla. "Figure to yourself, *petite!* The square of land before you was once a garden in the days when my grandfather was young."

Aimée nodded. The history was impending, and she was all attention.

"Yes, a garden, planted with cabbages and such things, and with a little cottage in the midst, where dwelt a crooked spinster. Do you know a crooked spinster when you see one?"

If Aimée knew! Why, these *veielles filles* exist in all lands.

Then Camilla, partly from need of speech, as uttered thought, and chiefly because Aimée was a sympathetic listener, continued her recital as they retraced their steps along the street to more attractive thoroughfares.

Joseph Belt, the young mechanic, already outstripping his comrades in industry, frugality, and temperance, qualities calculated to advance an active intelligence, had coveted the square of land, foreseeing the day when surrounding orchards and meadows must yield to houses and a swarming population, with the growth of the town. He had made overtures to the owner, boldly proposing to pay the large sum of two hundred and fifty dollars for the property, including the weather-beaten cottage, and the heiress had clamored shrilly for five hundred, abiding by the counsel of her late parent not to lightly part with her inheritance. Joseph Belt had agreed to these hard terms, scraping together the requisite money to add to his hoard of savings, and with many warnings to the heiress that she would not again receive such a liberal proposal. The latter, ejected, had married, and her descendants inveighed against the man whose prosperity dated from the moment of entering into possession, and whose foresight was a grievance even unto the first and second generation of children of the foolish, feminine Esau, who had parted with her birthright for so paltry a mess of pottage.

Joseph Belt, mechanic, had invented one of the first sewing-machines, pondering on the delicate mechanism of wheel and needle in the garret of a dingy tenement-house, alike indifferent to winter cold and summer heat, holding aloof from the quarrels and revels of

his neighbors. When he took possession of the little house, surrounded by the cabbage-garden, he had married a girl who had waited for him three years. The bride was the first woman to guide his invention in the rapid manipulation of tuck, hem, and ruffle, now so familiar to her sisters of every land.

The inventor lived in the primitive cottage, so suggestive of the suburban market-garden, while the vegetables ceased to be planted, and streets began to encroach on the space once fragrant with lilac and syringa bush and the blossoming of locust-trees. He hoarded his possessions, and every rood of land was cherished by him with miserly caution. The descendants of the heiress knew, to a dollar, what each lot brought him when parted with, and embittered their own days with unavailing repining.

Donald Belt was born beneath the roof of these defrauded ones. Ambition for the son aroused the parents to the full realization that their dwelling was squalid, and set in the midst of a kitchen-garden. The humble character of their abode troubled neither husband nor wife, for themselves, but with the advent of a son both began to cherish dreams after their own fashion. Donald was banished to a school in the country, of excellent reputation, and his subsequent visits to the cottage were made at rare intervals. What future career was best suited to him? The mother hinted at entering him at West Point. The father pondered on the many channels of profession open to a youth capable of commanding such advantages as his son. Joseph Belt, self-educated in very imperfect fashion, bestowed upon the next generation those facilities lacking to his own boyhood.

The son possessed a sound, if commonplace, intelligence, and, developing no preference for a military or professional career, entered a bank, as clerk, of which he was destined to speedily become the head. He early married a wife of his father's selection, an orphan of delicate constitution and sentimental taste in literature, who owned the modest house where the young couple resided, and thus obviated the difficulty of a too close identification with the paternal roof.

Joseph Belt lost his helpmate at this date, and refused to abandon the little house sacred to her memory. He came to be known as one of the eccentric personalities of a large community, a man keenly sagacious in speculation, avaricious, inexorable to a debtor, hard to the poor. His creed of hoarding, toiling, and scheming to gain more was plainly decipherable on his shrivelled physiognomy, in his shuffling gait, his abstracted mien, and negligent apparel. A poor old man, hugging his gold for the gold's sake; all manner of tales circulated about the town of the penury of his existence, the

sharp exactions of his bargains, served to swell the miser's biography, if not in literature, at least in the minds of his fellow-citizens. The nature of Joseph Belt had shrivelled instead of expanding. The humanitarian might ponder on the change, striving to trace the exact date when the vital cord of sympathy with his fellow-creatures had snapped; the town judged merely the result, with careless or rueful criticism, according to the amount of individual interest concerned. The sewing-machine had laid the foundation of his fortune, served as a stepping-stone to manifold investments, and been incorporated in a company, yet the invention clung to his name, as well as to that of his descendants.

Donald Belt had chosen other paths from the outset, and his parent did not oppose him. The younger man, unsympathetic by nature, strove to attain popularity, wished to stand well with his fellows, was even fond of a certain display of luxury requiring expenditure.

When Camilla was two years old her mother faded out of life in the new mansion on Tulip Place. A curious link of mutual interest developed, at this time, between grandparent and grandchild. Joseph Belt came to his son's house, and seated himself in an arm-chair, with his hands clasped on the knob of his cane, gravely scrutinizing the chubby child who was his sole descendant. Camilla, in turn, grasped his fingers fearlessly, and babbled to him the unintelligible secrets of an awakening intelligence.

The old man broached the expediency of a second marriage, in due course. He wished to bequeath his already vast possessions to his own descendants. The girl Camilla was too slender a hold on posterity. There must be boys, and especially a Joseph Belt, to become, in his day, identified with some further phase of development of New York, even as the grandfather had been with the early days of the settlement. Joseph Belt possessed the tenacity of the limpet in clinging to the rock of his native city.

Donald Belt listened a trifle impatiently. He was now a rich banker, in his own right, and had built the mansion on Tulip Place. His ways were no longer those of his progenitor, while his horizon daily expanded. When Joseph Belt hinted that he had discovered a suitable alliance in the blooming daughter of a wholesale grocer, the son promised to consider the matter. The old man's maxim in matrimony was that of the Yorkshire farmer—not to marry for money, but to go where money is plentiful.

Donald Belt, having occasion to make a journey, returned with a wife of his own selection, a girl so beautiful that the passer-by paused in involuntary surprise to admire her graceful figure, strange gray eyes, and blond tresses.

Nobody knew the home or origin of the second Mrs. Belt, any more than rumor could determine the reason for her hair turning perfectly white at a very early age.

Old Joseph Belt never forgave the slight put upon his own sagacity. The bride of his own choice was pretty, agreeable, and possessed of a snug fortune. Mrs. Belt, silent, timid, chilled, had not a penny in her own right. The cold wrath of a strong nature, which could not readily brook being thwarted, became concentrated in a disapproval, perpetually alert, sly, and vindictive towards the daughter-in-law, whose beauty adorned the new mansion, and modified, to a certain extent, the icy disapproval of Mr. St. Nicholas.

When a son was born the grandfather said:

"Let him be christened Joseph."

The baby died.

The following year a second boy saw the light in Tulip Place.

"Let him be christened Joseph," repeated the old man.

The baby died.

On the birth of a third boy the grandfather said:

"Let him be another Donald, if you choose."

The baby died, and through the silent house a breath, a sigh, seemed to sweep, with the warning that the children would never return. For the lovely mother remained the retrospection of

> "Some that never breathed
> The vital air; others which, though allowed
> That privilege, did yet expire too soon,
> Or with too brief a warning to admit
> Administration of the holy rite
> That lovingly consigns the babe to the arms
> Of Jesus and his everlasting care:
> These that in trembling hope are laid aside."

Joseph Belt ceased to notice his daughter-in-law, while a harder inflection became apparent in the voice of the husband when addressing her. Camilla, child and girl, usurped the sole interest of her grandfather, as crown princess to this king already bowing insensibly in increasing decrepitude before a higher power. The old man, together with his little house, exercised an extraordinary fascination on Camilla, whose active imagination was doubtless stimulated by those fragments of gossip ever in circulation between nursery and kitchen. Her grandfather was not like other men. His abode was full of treasures, and gold pieces might be hidden in the very walls. A doll, with countenance fashioned from a walnut-shell, and surmounted by a cotton nightcap, served as grandpa, in Camilla's first toy house. Her earliest effort in art was a pencil drawing of the kitchen-garden, and cottage surrounded by meadows.

When Joseph Belt fell from the tree of life, a withered leaf, he

bestowed upon his son property to the amount of one million dollars, ignored his daughter-in-law altogether, and left the remaining ten millions to his granddaughter, to be inherited on her twenty-first birthday.

Did clear-headed little Mademoiselle Aimée accept the family history at its true valuation, as she returned in the direction of Tulip Place, listening to Camilla's descriptions? The latter had no false pride in making frank disclosures of the idiosyncrasies of her race. Perhaps she did not value too much the opinion of her companion, favorable or otherwise. Her mood was communicative, and up to the present hour Camilla had invariably consulted her own inclinations. Little Aimée was profoundly interested, if mystified at times, by Camilla's idioms, for she conveyed the Belt record in French, with more of rapid fluency than accuracy. She was bound to accept Camilla's lightest word as gospel, for the latter had been kind and generous to her beyond all precedent, and yet she could not help judging these people from her own standpoint of tradition and education.

Aimée Rauvier had emerged from the dark little nook of the *haute cité* of Geneva, where dwelt the uncle and aunt Béchet, who had received her, offspring of exiles from Nice, when the French annexed Savoy and that portion of the Riviera extending to Ventimiglia. Carefully trained in all maidenly excellences by Tante Marthe, learned in matters of theology, the household, the virtues of *tisanes* and tar-water, in their season, as well as the craft of needlework, Aimée had attained her eighteen years in the shadow of the cathedral where lie the Duc de Rohan and other illustrious dead, and near the Rue des Chanoines, where died John Calvin. No less thoroughly educated was the pretty orphan, under the active supervision of the Uncle Jacques, with his big nose much stimulated by perpetual snuff-taking, his grizzled mustache veiling a humorous mouth, and thin locks falling on his shoulders from beneath a velvet skullcap. The Uncle Jacques led an exemplary life as editor, botanist, politician in one, imbued with pride in Charles Bonnet, Berthelier, De Saussure, as well as François le Fort, minister of Peter the Great, on whom Voltaire bestowed the eulogy, "Sans ce Genevois la Russie serait peut-être encore barbare."

Brief space of leisure had the little maiden to listen to the note of the cathedral organ swelling out on the place, on a summer evening, or to revel in surreptitious perusal of Rousseau's "Émile," the book burned before the Hôtel de Ville in the good old times. She must seek work early as nursery governess, companion, or assistant teacher in a pension to gain her bread. She had taken her courage

in both hands, and descended the steep, narrow streets to seek a fashionable hotel on the shore of the lake, then thronged with summer visitors.

Camilla Belt had not only engaged her temporary services, as a conversationalist, but climbed the narrow way, crossed the damp court, and scaled the winding stair to the dark chamber, with flower-pots on the window-ledge, to demand permission of the smiling Uncle Jacques and no less complacent Tante Marthe to carry away their niece to America.

Aimée Rauvier had drawn a prize in the lottery of governess, and need seek neither remote Russian province nor Neapolitan household to gain independence. An ancient maxim of national astuteness affirms that ten Jews cannot cheat a Swiss, nor ten Swiss outwit a Genevese. The Uncle Jacques made suitable inquiries and stipulations, and then consigned Aimée to the safe-keeping of the Belt family. Since that hour the waking thought and dreams of the girl had centred in them. She traced a part of romance for Mrs. Belt, and a future of brilliant prosperity for Camilla. She found a motive of loftiest magnitude for Donald Belt's simplest act, as a king of finance, and a citizen of authority, capable of ruling his fellow-men.

Camilla gave some money to a beggar, because she felt more at ease, herself, in so doing, and stared, with the swift scrutiny characteristic of the New York woman, at a passing carriage. The two girls reached Tulip Place in good spirits, and with appetite for luncheon.

Mrs. Belt awaited them, and listened, with her faint smile, to her stepdaughter's voluble description of revisiting the site of her grandfather's home.

At two o'clock Mrs. Belt rustled into Camilla's rooms, and announced, with an odd inflection of surprise and excitement in her voice:

"That Mrs. Monteith has called, Camilla."

"Has she? Better late than never! Are you gratified, mamma?"

"I am neither gratified nor displeased," retorted Mrs. Belt, dryly.

"I don't care! After Europe everything seems different."

"True," assented Camilla.

The ladies descended the stairway to the largest of the state drawing-rooms of the Belt mansion, and any element of cold constraint at first perceptible in their bearing thawed in the presence of the visitor.

Mrs. Monteith was very affable, amusing, and ingratiating for the space of fifteen minutes, and when she again departed it was plainly understood by both Mrs. Belt and Camilla that the St. Nicholas

family henceforth intended to know them. Were they gratified, triumphant, or resentful? They looked at each other in silence, for a moment, and then Camilla laughed.

That evening the opera of the "Ballo in Maschera" was succeeded by a ballet of unusual excellence. When Mrs. Belt and Camilla took their places they observed Mrs. Monteith, with a group of ladies, in the opposite box of the brilliant and crowded theatre.

The ballet opened with a mediæval scene, towers and gables rising against a dark sky, where the moon vainly strove to pierce sombre clouds, while in the foreground Superstition, in guise of bearded necromancer, held captive in his chains the muffled form of Light, or Progress, until the latter broke her fetters and leaped forth before the audience a dazzling creature sheathed in glittering armor, swiftly surrounded by lovely nymphs of air and sea, palpitating with life and motion.

Mademoiselle Aimée clasped her hands, and hung upon the spectacle with childish delight. Camilla's glance idly measured the depths of the theatre, and reverted to the animated party opposite. She saw Mrs. Monteith summon her brother from the rear of the box, speak to him, and point with her fan in the direction of the Belts. At the same time her glance and the inclination of the head signified to Camilla, "I have sent my brother to invite you to join us for a time."

Camilla heard the box door open behind her, while her father announced:

"I have brought you an unexpected visitor."

Then the beautiful voice that had mingled with her dreams of the morning added, in broken English,

"Ladies, I hope I find you in good health."

"Count Della Stella!" exclaimed Mrs. Belt, in unfeigned surprise.

"I arrived too late to pay my respects to-day, so I came to the theatre, where I am so fortunate as to find the ladies," was the gay yet deprecating response.

Camilla gave him her hand just as William St. Nicholas appeared, bearer of Mrs. Monteith's invitation.

"I should like to go," said Camilla, rising from her chair in the front of the box.

"Come, then, Miss Belt," said William St. Nicholas, who was one of the most unconventional of men.

Camilla glanced at the count, who stood between them with eyes of eloquent reproach fixed upon her face.

"No; another time," she added, and resumed her place.

Donald Belt bowed the St. Nicholas out, with a sentiment of triumph, and launched after him a little arrow of explanatory excuse:

"A friend has just arrived from Europe. He belongs to the household of the King of Italy, you know."

On the stage the discouraged inventor built the first steamer, only to have a brutal peasantry destroy it by means of rhythmic blows of hammer and axe, while Superstition caught the winged butterfly, Light, and once more imprisoned her in chains, as the violins and bass viols shuddered in a tumult of confused sound.

"So you have come to visit America," Camilla remarked to the count.

"Yes. I have come because I could no longer remain absent," he replied, in a lower tone.

The music of the orchestra pulsed on the charmed ear, the tiers of gilded boxes seemed to mingle in shifting colors before the dazzled eye, while in the growing effulgence of day, on the stage, the tortuous dungeon labyrinths of the Past crumbled and vanished, and Progress once more spurned the thraldom of opposition, soaring to an apotheosis of triumph, bathed in rosy fires, her crown of stars gleaming amidst the clouds, her sceptre directing the course of flying messengers, setting in motion the ships on distant seas, the fragile cable of suspension bridges, and the hollowing out of tunnels in the mountains for the meeting of the nations.

William St. Nicholas returned to his sister, and yawned, as he stood, with folded arms, in the rear of the box. Bengal lights and draperies of pink gauze did not interest him.

Camilla turned her face slowly towards the count, and their eyes met.

"In our country we call the dance a thought, a wish, living poetry," he said, softly.

CHAPTER IV.

DECEMBER'S OTHER CHILD.

"*The man should make the hour, not this the man.*"—TENNYSON.

CAMILLA returned home from the theatre in an abstracted mood. She replied to her father's pleasantries concerning the advent of the Count Della Stella somewhat petulantly, and turned away from the manifest sympathy of her stepmother.

What did it all mean, the jests and significant glances of spectators? She was half-displeased, vexed, disquieted. She had attained her twenty-first year absolutely fancy free. The attitude of the count was very different from that of the young men previously gathered about her—brothers of her school friends, companions of church decoration, summer tours, and yachting parties. She wilfully persisted in viewing the jaunty and gallant Colonel Crosbie Ellery King as old, and to be laughed at. Captain Rawdon, erect and dapper, with neat little features, a fresh complexion, and black whiskers, seemed to her only a fit subject for feminine tyranny and badinage.

The count, on the contrary, stepped forth from the unknown, a graceful knight of resplendent lineage. Was it not only too probable that Donald Belt's daughter would present the brimming wine-cup of her capricious choice to the stranger in the doorway rather than the familiar companions seated at the banquet, after the example of the Greek maiden of old?

Donald Belt was perturbed, and for the moment diverted from many engrossing pursuits, by the coming of the Count Della Stella. The banker, in person a florid man of middle age, heavy in stature, with a massive nose, prominent blue eyes, a shaven chin, and gray side-whiskers, was wholly insensible to the attractions of such a suitor. The inherent tyranny of an aggressive character, the irascibility of a restless temperament, found ample scope in his position of increasing influence, but the sole soft sentiment of tenderness in his nature centred in his daughter.

"I suppose you are aware this count has followed you over here," he said, in the carriage.

Camilla winced.

"The country is free to all travellers, I suppose," she retorted, a trifle defiantly.

"The count is a most attractive man," said Mrs. Belt. "All the girls in New York will be wild about him in a week."

"What is it to you?" demanded Donald Belt, rudely, and in a tone he was only too apt to assume in his own family circle. "Let the Italian dance about New York, if he chooses. Professor Ashwell is to be our guest. I intend to run down the bay on board my new steam-launch to meet the *Black Star*. I have invited some prominent citizens to accompany me. I wonder what Mr. St. Nicholas will think of our having Professor Vincent Ashwell as a visitor at our house in Tulip Place, eh?"

"I have invited the count to dine with us to-morrow night," pursued Mrs. Belt. "Perhaps you will show him the Park, Camilla."

"Oh, yes; I will show him the Park," assented Camilla.

She bade her stepmother good-night, dismissed her maid, and remained alone in her own rooms. How different was the evening from the promise of the morning! She was weary, spent, dejected in her very indecision. Was she glad or sorry that the count had come? She could not determine. Many girls would taste only the sweetest triumph in his advent, and play adroitly with the more serious elements of the situation. There were few elements of coquetry in Camilla's nature; nay, fastidious critics found her very generosity masculine in breadth and vigor. The girl on whose shoulders the mantle of old Joseph Belt had fallen intended to do right, according to her lights, and could be very tolerant and kind to the weak. She was forced to take the count's visit seriously, only what was she to do with him? She wished, with a sudden warmth of vexation, that she had never met him, never drank of the Trevi water, never lingered near Como in the twilight, breathing the delicate flattery of his homage.

She sat beside the table, plunged in meditation, supporting her head on her hands. The lamp of Venetian glass, placed on a crystal mirror, as a standard, and with a shade in the form of the fluted chalice of a flower, glowed like a large emerald in the obscurity of the room, defining here the design of a curtain, and there sparkling on a metal dish, a water-color sketch, a Pompeian bronze.

"I never expected him to come over here," exclaimed Camilla, aloud. "No! I am not glad to see him. He should have known better!"

The green lamps glowed in the room; the pictures and statuettes seemed to watch her. A blush suffused her cheek as she felt once more the pressure of fervent lips on her hand. If she had not encouraged, she had not repulsed him.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Monteith and her brother had reached their own habitation, after leaving two ladies at their respective homes. Mrs. Monteith parted with these friends with kisses, terms of endearment, and a renewal of engagements for the morrow. Left alone with her brother, she inquired, with an abrupt change of tone and manner,

"Did you invite Miss Belt to join us, Willy?"

"Yes."

"And she refused?" still more dryly and sharply.

"She declined. I fancy some foreigner had just arrived," negligently.

"Ah! So soon? I did not imagine he would come immediately."

"You know him, then?" questioned William St. Nicholas, with some surprise.

The sister smiled in the darkness, and pressed her pearl fan to her lips, as if to suppress a yawn.

"Miss Belt will marry a foreign title, my dear. That is inevitable. You do not imagine the impecunious old world will let ten millions dowry go a-begging, do you? Camilla Belt has been prodigiously advertised abroad, during her recent travels, by her discreet parent, and others. Well, from a standpoint of political economy, I heartily wish the money had not been drained out of the country. Besides, she is not at all bad, do you know."

"Not at all bad," assented the brother, speaking with his habitual equanimity. "She seems to possess plenty of decision of character."

"Perhaps temper," suggested Mrs. Monteith, meditatively. "Willy, do you never intend to marry?"

"No."

"Have you never met a girl you would like to marry?" plaintively.

"Never," with emphasis.

Mrs. Monteith sighed.

"You know what a blow such obstinacy must prove to our parents, dear. You are the last—"

"Last of the Mohicans," he interrupted, mockingly.

"Men often marry just to please their families, and find themselves very comfortable," continued Mrs. Monteith, gazing out of the carriage window. "Why! I do believe you are laughing at me, you horrid boy."

"I do believe that I am. Ah, Mrs. Monteith, your match-making schemes are more transparent than you imagine. Confess that you have already mated your unworthy brother, in imagination, with Camilla Belt."

"I shall confess nothing of the kind," she retorted, with unnecessary warmth of denial. "Do give me the credit for retaining a shred of sense, after having lived with you so many years. Camilla Belt is not in the market at all, as I have good reason to believe. She would not be a suitable wife for you, under any circumstances."

"Wherefore, my lady?" he said, in a teasing tone.

"Wherefore? How can you ask such idiotic questions, Willy? Papa would not hear of the thing, and as for mamma, with her prejudices of family, her days would be shortened by having the sewing-machine brought under our roof. When I see a nice girl I cannot help wishing you would fall in love with her. All gossip about Camilla Belt is beyond the question."

William St. Nicholas smoothed his beard, and remarked, gravely,

"I saw such a girl this morning. She had just been to market, and her cheeks were as fresh as the beets and carrots in her basket."

"Willy!" shrieked Mrs. Monteith, in horrified accents.

"She dwells somewhere over towards the North River. I think I had better seek and ask her if she will condescend to marry me, and perpetuate the St. Nicholas line. I dare say she would not have me, for she was flirting with the butcher's boy when her charms first stole upon my sight."

"How absurd you are, Willy!" said the sister, laughing. "I think we had best begin to know the Belts this winter. One cannot tell what may happen. I must work for my child, you know."

William St. Nicholas smiled, in turn.

When Mrs. Monteith had no further argument to advance in defence of a premeditated measure, she invariably took refuge in the welfare of her son, Willy, the younger, and his suitable advancement in life.

She had married, at the age of seventeen, a handsome young officer of the American army, after a romantic courtship at West Point, returning to the paternal mansion in Tulip Place a few years after, a widow, with a little boy.

Mrs. Monteith was a leader of society, full of animation and ceaseless activity, with hosts of friends and numerous admirers, accessible to all, by reason of a grace of sympathy a trifle artificial, yet passing current as genuine coin in the world's exchange. She could launch a sarcasm, venom-tipped, at a rival with all possible amiability. Usually attired in black, her tall and slender form acquired an eccentricity not without charm, in the high shoulder-knots, puffs, and ruffs of modern fashion, attributed to the example of the shadowy actress Sarah Bernhardt. The long and pointed nose, thin lips, and keen eyes of her pale, oval face, as well as the excessive thinness of her

hands, where the rings perpetually slipped and rattled on the delicate fingers, betrayed a nervous temperament seldom at rest. In the routine of winter season and summer journeying Mrs. Monteith represented perpetual motion. A brain less clear, a memory less retentive, would have failed to retain the pressing claims of visiting, shopping, letter-writing to bosom friends, projects for founding charitable institutions, committees for those already existing, all in their routine of daily existence. She was prone to enthusiastic espousal of a new cause, eloquent concerning visionary schemes of which she would shine, herself, as the founder, desirous to play the gracious part of benefactress to modest talent, and, above all, a lion-hunter of the first order. Unimaginative persons were wont to affirm that the lady had a "bee in her bonnet."

Mrs. Monteith was known as a writer of verses, with a felicitous turn, adapted to certain occasions, and a novel, published anonymously, entitled "Daffodils and Violets." The romance had dealt with sentiment in lofty strain, and it was well understood in her circle that the authoress could do much better work than the rubbish turned out with prodigal liberality by the modern press, if she only had leisure to devote to literary pursuits. At the same time it was unanimously regretted that "Daffodils and Violets" had not been confined to the select few, by means of private subscription.

Willy Monteith met the carriage at the curbstone, and assisted his mother to alight.

"Such a lark, mamma!" he announced, gayly. "We fellows are going to give a series of *soirées* at the Bachelor's Club. We have been making out the programme this evening."

"My darling boy, you must not become an old bachelor," replied Mrs. Monteith, taking his arm to ascend the steps.

William St. Nicholas sought his own rooms on the third floor, and lighted his meerschaum pipe. He was good-humored, with the placidity which implies indifference, as a rule, but he found his sister's conversation more annoying than amusing on this evening. Surely she had been even a little tiresome with her matrimonial hobbies.

He had attained his thirty-fifth year almost without incident, except of his own choosing. In public estimation he was an easy-going, perhaps insignificant person, who failed to assert a distinct individuality, as his father's son should have done. He was utterly devoid of ambition, and preferred, like the Orientals, to hire his dancing done for him by others to mere physical exertion, while each recurring season found him less inclined to meet the claims of society. He was the only son and chief cause of solicitude to parents stanch in adherence to the tenets of their family creed, and narrow in prejudice as to admitting broader lights of innovation. Given a house-

hold of brothers, William St. Nicholas might have chosen a career, and filled it with honor to himself and his kindred. As it was, his mother would fain have trained him in some dame school, in infancy, and allowed scarcely more of wholesome liberty in boyhood. His father was no less scrupulous. When other topics failed, the old couple could still ponder on the position of their boy, and how he must comport himself under such and such circumstances.

Mr. St. Nicholas still treasured a note in the most secret recesses of his desk, addressed to him many years before by his admiring fellow-citizens, and requesting his acceptance of the nomination of Mayor of the city of New York. He had declined hastily, even testily, reluctant to soil his hands with politics. Occasionally he reverted to the note, inspired by a certain vanity, and even inscribed the date on the envelope that no error might result, when his own autobiography should be written. Had he flinched from the performance of a duty? The doubt still troubled him, at times. He had shunned politics, and his son must, also, avoid the strife.

Private tutors had prepared William for college. What other portal could open for the youth than Columbia, sometime King's College, with reminiscences of William Samuel Johnson, Benjamin Moore, or John McVicar still fresh in the memory of his mother?

At this date the son fiercely rebelled. He cast tutors and schools to the winds. He wished to become a sailor, to enter the navy, to cruise far, far away from Tulip Place, amid coral reefs and icebergs, to inhale, with full lungs, the breath of the tempest in mid-ocean, to feel the stillness of the Arctic dawn. The revolt amazed and alarmed his relatives. In the family conclave held in the library there were expostulations, entreaties, even tears. William disliked the library ever after. The lad yielded to the will of his parents, and went to college submissively, if sullenly. He even enjoyed a fair share of youthful recreations, in the way of oyster suppers and billiards. His college term expired, he dutifully read law. His docility was admirable and commendable, but he distinguished himself in nothing. He was permitted to travel, and speedily returned home, caring little for foreign lands. His mother smiled, well pleased with the course of events. His father experienced a shade of disappointment in the result. Acquiescence a little less ready to the household fiat of preference, and far less dulness of perception of passing events, in his son would have gratified the paternal pride of Mr. St. Nicholas.

William's disinclination to matrimony did not disturb his mother. She had him all to herself a little while longer, and he was safe from evil influences, she reasoned, with maternal selfishness. Mr. St. Nicholas, on the contrary, had been rendered uneasy, even suspicious, by the equanimity of his son. He would have preferred irritability, fu-

rious outbreaks of discontent, restless moods. When one of William's comrades showed himself clever in the professions, or even brilliantly popular in society, the father felt a pang akin to jealousy. Why was not the eloquent orator, capable of moving all hearts, the surgeon who had grasped some of the secrets of his century by means of superior intuition, the scholar, already allied to his fellows of other lands, irrespective of language, by those bonds of intellectual affinity alone found to exist between men of science, his boy? Was it sufficient to be merely a man of leisure?

Once the weapon of reproach had pierced the paternal armor of self-complacency. William had thrown aside a review, with compressed lip, quivering nostril, and frowning brow, to hastily quit the room, as if fearing to lose all control in speech. Old Mr. St. Nicholas had taken up the periodical, smoothed the crumpled sheet, and, spectacles on nose, sought the source of his son's emotion with considerable curiosity. He found it in an article on the gallant exploits of an American naval officer in the East, who had landed, with a band of marines, in season to save a town from a rebel horde of invaders. Would William have wished to fill the part of the naval hero? That was a boyish folly best forgotten by this time. Mr. St. Nicholas found his offspring a trifle heavy for his years, and visibly losing elasticity of gait, manner, and mind, such as evince some mainspring of action in character. William showed the most amiable side of his nature in his family circle, yielding to the foibles of his father, petting his mother, teasing his sister, and contemplating the youthful escapades of his nephew with patriarchal benevolence. He never waxed warm in argument about any matter. He accepted the world as he found it. He cared nothing for the gods worshipped by his progenitors, the volumes of a well-ordered library, the tulips, even the ancient sun-dial on the stable wall, in the rear of the gardens. He poked fun, in unseemly fashion, at the memory of his ancestors, and when reminded of the glorious deeds of his own grandfather, on the maternal side, indulged in wholly irrelevant musings respecting the grandfather of the milkman, who, in the sequence of nature, must have had one. He was stained with no ineradicable blemish of vices, but he was not invariably an interesting companion. In his youth he had been thwarted when he would have chosen a career. Voltaire affirms that no genius has ever found the light except in opposition to near relatives. If William St. Nicholas possessed talent he gave no sign. He was one of that numerous class of human failures who, dissatisfied, remain inactive, watching the work of others, brooding in regretful thought. "I might have achieved as much if I had realized the occasion in time, or been given the same chance," is the plea of the supine and the unfortunate.

Then had dawned a day when a radiant goddess claimed him as her slave, and he had obeyed her summons, half wondering that he had not earlier yielded to her spell. The goddess was music. The brotherhood of musicians of all nationalities, ages, and conditions had been received and welcomed by him, from the prima-donna, fresh from fatherland, to the poorest violinist of the theatre orchestra.

William St. Nicholas assured himself he had found his sphere. He organized a musical club, where all notable strangers were received and the needy given aid. He began to collect rare musical instruments in his room, and a library dealing only with his favorite study. Insensibly he acquired tone and semblance of his chosen associates. His beard became luxuriant, he smoked a meerschaum pipe in preference to the cigar or cigarette, he drank beer.

A shabby back parlor on one of the city thoroughfares eastward, where a game of dominoes was the sole diversion, and a bowl of potato salad the chief refection, afforded him more enjoyment than the most brilliant reunion frequented by his sister, provided he could listen to a Berlin professor, a Munich *impresario*, a Leipzig composer descant on the respective excellences of Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. Suspected of the superficiality of the dilettanti by a severe and inexorable master, he fed humbly on Bach and Mozart until such time as he was permitted to taste the dangerous sweets of Beethoven.

"Music will keep him out of mischief, I dare say," Mr. St. Nicholas remarked, in the bosom of his family. "A man who practises daily on the French horn and the cornet-à-piston, not to mention the pianoforte and organ, has no leisure—or wind—left for worse deeds."

Personally Mr. St. Nicholas abhorred music, especially the classical school in which his son delighted, and on more than one occasion, after submitting to philharmonic and symphony concerts, was prepared to exclaim with Weber's contrabasso:

"I have a tolerably strong constitution, and could just hold out."

His own preferences did not prevent his suspending on the wall of his son's chamber an illuminated strip to the effect that a man who hath not music in him is fit for stratagem and treason.

His world sat in judgment on William St. Nicholas. He was not such as they, his tastes led him among shabby company, his ways were those of Bohemia; a somewhat vague term, implying the disreputable. He had been seen to carry out an old coat to the organ-grinder at the corner, to the inexpressible indignation of the St. Nicholas servants. He belonged to the innovators, who follow stray lights which may lead them among the quicksands, and develop the fool or the crazed madman as often as the hero and martyr. The innovators are a class to be suspected and thwarted, by society, at all hazards.

Women accepted his peculiarities with a wistful leniency. Mothers said to their budding daughters:

"If any girl could catch Willy St. Nicholas, and lure him away from his fiddles and his German beer-drinking, what a triumph it would be!"

This sentiment led to the bestowal of those gushing attentions on old Mrs. St. Nicholas and Mrs. Monteith which the mother and sister of an eligible man rarely fail to receive.

Speculative rather than creative, richer in sensibility than the artistic faculty of action, William St. Nicholas had grown to like the solitude of his own meditations or a book, for he was an indiscriminate novel-reader, craving amusement rather than instruction in didactic form. The novel was not recreation from work, the turning aside from sober and harassing routine for refreshment in pure fiction; unlimited leisure permitted him to share the adventures of the hero and sympathize with the misfortunes of the heroine at all hours of day or night. As a natural result the romance frequently bored him, and he tossed the volume aside with contemptuous impatience.

Was William St. Nicholas a man of imagination? Would work with him be other than so much of the achievement in this world, scientific and mathematical in principle, a model of symmetry resulting from careful education, yet extremely dull and uninteresting in result? Did he possess the true, supreme, and divine gift which flashes upon and overwhelms judgment and outlives time?

After bidding his sister good-night he had sought his rooms with a feeling of unusual discontent. His face wore a sombre expression, as he moved about the chamber, restlessly, pipe in mouth. He was weary of Alice's chatter, and the glib prattle of her friends in the box at the theatre. In his own mind he compared these ladies to the birds of an aviary, all chirping, and fluttering perpetually on uneasy wing.

He approached the window, and opened it to admit the frosty air. His abstracted eye scanned the opposite mansion, where the lights were not yet extinguished. A green star burned in the window of Camilla. He seated himself at a desk, selected a sheet of paper, and wrote on it:

THE BIRTHDAY.

Operetta.

By William St. Nicholas.

It was his virgin effort at composition. He had grouped the engravings on the wall after the fancy of Bourbet of uniting music and painting, by placing, in friendly juxtaposition, Handel and Michael Angelo, Glück and Caravaggio, Mozart and Domenichino, Beethoven

and Rembrandt. Did any of these silent spectators aid his effort? He sought inspiration neither from the champagne-cup of Rossini, the missals and classic authors of Zingarelli, the midnight darkness, lighted by a single taper, of Sarti; the hot fowls and smoking Bologna sausage of Aufossi.

All about him the musical instruments were equally mute, the harpsichord of the last century, with painted lid, the Japanese harp, inlaid with silver and pearl, the collection of primitive drums and fifes, fashioned by Abyssinian skill.

Camilla speedily regained her habitual confidence. "The count is at liberty to visit New York," she said, aloud. "I intend to welcome Professor Ashwell as well. How many strings you have to your bow, Camilla! Live your little day, my dear!"

CHAPTER V.

PROFESSOR VINCENT ASHWELL DISCOVERS AMERICA.

"By fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks,
Sleeking her soft, alluring locks."—MILTON.

ON the twenty-first of December the steamship *Black Star* reached the port of New York, after a fair run from Liverpool, and having among her passengers of the first class Professor Vincent Ashwell.

Although no longer young, he was now making a first voyage across the ocean, having, in his own personal experience, recently discovered America.

He was a slight and pale man, with clean-cut features, thin lips, a closely shaven chin, and a pair of bright gray eyes, protected by spectacles with steel rims. The black hair on his temples was thinning, while the crown of his head was bald, and the fringe of whisker on his cheek already grizzled in tint.

Having discovered America, the country and people interested him to the entire exclusion of former pursuits, which were thus held in abeyance, for a time at least. Not only was he deeply interested in America, but there was rapidly developing in his soul an anxiety for the future of a great people, and a desire that they should be guided by his lights, and no other. The British colonial standard must still prevail, in his opinion, or if wavering in the shifting currents of a vast emigration—German, Scandinavian, and Irish—it should be his duty to re-establish it on firm ground. With this highly commendable end in view the professor was now approaching the land of promise, a number of carefully prepared lectures on scientific subjects in his portmanteau, and a goodly store of letters of introduction in his portfolio. The lectures had already won him fame in London, while the introductions covered the field of American social life, from the Boston literary circles, the New York millionaire, or the Philadelphia railroad magnate, to the Chicago, St. Louis, and New Orleans citizen.

Professor Ashwell attached more value to introduction than does the average American, and would have manifested the same care in getting himself well presented had his destination been Montenegro or Kamtchatka instead of the States.

Prominent among these letters was one from Donald Belt, containing a warm invitation to sojourn beneath that gentleman's roof during a stay at New York.

Professor Ashwell lighted a cigar, and leaned against the bulwark of the *Black Star*, surveying the harbor and distant shores. Then he took from the pocket of his portemonnaie a small photograph, bearing the name of a noted photographer in Regent Street. This was a vignette of Camilla Belt, with her hair drawn low across the brow, and wearing an English jacket, with *gilet*, and standing collar of masculine aspect.

He scrutinized this trophy of sentiment furtively, and even a trifle shamefacedly, as if he feared intrusion on his private interests, on the part of his fellow-passengers, and restored the card to the pocket once more.

He was deeply concerned for the tendencies of transatlantic politics, scandalized by the management of the Indian question, amazed that students able to seek foreign education should more frequently flock to the German universities than to English colleges, and aggrieved that all existing complications of the home government should not move America to loyal indignation against Kaffirs, Abyssinians, and Egyptians, not less than perplexed by amicable relations with the arch-enemy, Russia.

Would these matters have acquired tangible form in his mind had he not carried the photograph of Camilla Belt in his pocket-book? The tendency of the day to acknowledge the importance of the great republic, and the desirability of making a lecturing tour of a remunerative sort through the lands of the West might have penetrated, at length, and checked the routine to which he had given himself up for so many years; yet the girl in the English jacket, with features somewhat heavy and dark in the photograph, had served as the keynote of sudden and swift resolution.

Professor Vincent Ashwell was a native of Bristol, and the younger son of a clergyman. He had early quitted the vicinity of the iron and brass founderies, and the haunts of the coasting trade of his cradle, for a public school, where he had enjoyed his full share of that discipline so largely dwelt upon in bitter or humorous retrospection in modern British autobiography. Medicine proving his choice of profession, he entered the University of Edinburgh, and studied subsequently at the Hospital of St. Bartholomew in London. Unusual diligence and perspicacity in preparing a museum catalogue which required vast labor and profound research gained for him the post of curator of the institution, and decided the bent of his future career towards natural science rather than the practice of medicine. The student began to climb slowly and steadily, with

the ultimate goal of the British museum in view, which he had attained in due season. The years had borne fruit of honorable toil to the lecturer, zoologist, and paleontologist. If he was not the "Cuvier of England," he enjoyed a certain popularity for agreeable manners, eloquence, and tact, while commanding universal respect for his more solid attainments. Society had opened her doors to him since he had written a memoir on the Pearly Nautilus, that most poetical shape of the myriad dwellers of the sea, while his great work on the Anatomy of Vertebrates brought him a foreign medal or two.

For the past ten years Professor Ashwell had led that double life which is the best calculated to preserve a man from rust, in a metropolis where the friction of events stirs even the currents of the lecture-room. He spent the day, and often the night, in patient research and absorbing study, but he varied the exactions of such routine by playing a rubber of whist at his club, of an afternoon, and dining out. He was a guest in great request, being *au courant* with the latest item of news about illustrious persons, and capable of telling a neatly turned story, or making a witty addition to the current conversation, without arousing the jealousy of the true wits other than to respect his own latent powers.

Journeys had been undertaken by him only at rare intervals, and with entire reference to the lower Silurian beds of Bohemia, or the strata of silicious shells of infusoria in Sweden. It is to be feared that America existed for him, at this date, only as a land where the city of Richmond might be located on a strata of marine origin in the Tertiary age, certain interesting footprints of the Triassic period be traced in the sandstone of the valley of the Connecticut, or untold treasures be discovered in the great carboniferous basin of Ohio.

"Goodness knows what people do out of England," Professor Ashwell had conjectured on more than one occasion, as he took his seat at the whist-table, while the fog settled on the club window, with a glimmer of yellow gas jets visible here and there through the dull opacity of uniform vapor.

He spoke with the comfortable conviction of the mortal born in one of the centres of the universe, and duly appreciative of all the attendant privileges.

During the previous season he had given his best labors, scientifically speaking, to the stringing together of the bones of an extinct animal, and was surveying the result, with his own spine and head aching from the protracted task, when his partner at whist looked in on him, and bore him away to a sale of the artistic effects of a dead marchioness, once famous for her beauty, and sometime an actress of saucy, *soubrette* parts at a suburban theatre.

The partner at whist was Colonel Dashwood, a retired Indian officer, a plethoric old gentleman of pugnacious temperament, with a rubicund complexion, an erect bearing, and a white mustache. The Amen corner of a club remained for the soldier, after an active life, and he was also a collector, who derived amusement, not only from haunting London sales, but made a visit to the Hôtel Denot, the special object of crossing the Channel, and even sought the precincts of certain German antiquarians, *en route* for Carlsbad and Baden, renowned for their hoard of *faïence*, arms, enamels, and sacred vessels, gleaned from ancient Bavarian monasteries and bishops' palaces.

Professor Ashwell had yielded to the whim of his friend with the more readiness that his head ached and his entire nervous system required relaxation.

The two gentlemen mingled with the crowd at the sale, the one as an amused spectator, and the other imbued with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur, now examining a Sèvres cup and saucer of yellow ground, decorated with flowers, through his double eyeglass; a Chinese celadon green vase, a Louis Seize candlestick, and again pausing to descant on the merits of a portrait of Madame de Pompadour, the beauty of a marqueterie secretary, or the value of a medallion.

Professor Ashwell listened to the dissertations of his companion, admiring the *objets d'art*, with the abstraction of one superior to these trifles by reason of a more intimate acquaintance with the mastodon and the dinornis.

The gem of the collection was an antique bracelet, worn by the marchioness, in her prime, on an arm rivalling in faultless symmetry the living sceptres of Grecian or Persian favorites of Darius and Alexander, once adorned by the same ornament.

Robbed of all association, the bracelet was in the shape of a modern bangle, having at the ends two winged sphinx-heads, and still bearing traces of the enamel wrought by the craftsman who journeyed from the banks of the Ganges to foreign courts, or worked in the doorway of his dark little shop, melting, moulding, and engraving in sight of the busy street. A perfume of beauty lingered about the relic of centuries, rescued from oblivion by an enterprising traveller. From the favorite of the conqueror's court, who had lost the trinket when feasting beneath the silken dome of the tent, to the marchioness of the footlights the imagination had free scope for poetical reveries, culminating in the desire for possession.

Colonel Dashwood yielded to the charm, as had a young lady in a blue redingote, wearing a small billycock hat, decked with a bird's wing.

"I wish it," said the young lady, in cool and quiet accents.

When the sale took place, and the bidding on the classical bauble had become animated, Colonel Dashwood had come to the front, inspired by the keen interest of the collector. The young lady in the redingote proved a rival competitor, imbued with feminine obstinacy in addition, and it came to be understood that the person who persistently outbid Colonel Dashwood was no tool of the auction-room, deputed to lead him on, by skilful manipulation, but the agent of this stranger. The prize fell to her at one thousand pounds' valuation, and she received it, clasping the bracelet about her wrist, outside of her buff Swede glove. Had the ornament been a circlet of garnets or turquoises from the Ponte-Vecchio at Florence, or one of those serpentine links of silver which impart to the movements of a woman a continual rattle, as of spurs and armor, she could not have been more collected and indifferent. Who was the stranger? An American, evidently, from her speech and bearing. Rumor even entered the salesroom with her, and accorded Camilla Belt a fortune of two million pounds. Colonel Dashwood lost his temper; even Professor Ashwell was a trifle aghast. Testy in temperament, and with hereditary gout ever lurking in his system, the colonel had never discovered America, and cherished deeply rooted prejudices against that country, if allowed to exist at all. As the two gentlemen departed he inveighed in no measured terms against the presumption of his fair antagonist. Colonel Dashwood could ill brook interference from such a source.

"This sort of thing should be put down, you know," the irascible and baffled collector had proclaimed, at the corner of the street, pausing, with his furled umbrella held under one arm, while the glow of wrath still suffused his cheek and glistened in his prominent blue eyes.

Professor Ashwell assented. The incident rendered him thoughtful. He began to level his telescope on the distant shore to which he had never before given heed. He emerged from the Pliocene period, so to speak, to be presented to Donald Belt at Claridge's Hotel, where the latter was sojourning with his family for the season. He discovered America in the person of Camilla, who embodied to his mind the fulfilment of the physical geography: "As the plant nourishes the animal, so America is made for the man of the Old World. The two are face to face, and incline towards each other. The Old bends towards the New, and America looks towards Europe."

Pausing near the bulwark of the steamship *Black Star* Professor Ashwell beheld, instead of the harbor and city of New York, an agreeable future for himself, with a congenial helpmate by his side,

a house in Mayfair, where the *élite* of the world would gather, a country-seat near his native town of Bristol, a cottage of his own building on the bank of a river in Norway, with exclusive rights to the salmon-fishing, and the founding of various scholarships, in due course of time.

On board the steamer Professor Ashwell was a personality dry and cool rather than warmly sympathetic to all sorts and conditions of men; just as he detested cricket, boating, and tennis, preferring the quiet pastime of fishing. He exchanged pleasantries with the bluff old captain, who enjoyed the usual reputation of Atlantic voyagers of the class, that he had never lost a ship or a life. He chatted with the actor, tall, sallow, and slender, enveloped in an ulster, who paced the deck with complacent step, building air-castles as to his welcome in the theatre of America. He avoided the professional beauty, surrounded by a bevy of admirers, and whose lightest *mot*, smile, or frown would be carefully treasured by those fortunate enough to receive either. He was equally wary in his intercourse with the British lady traveller, whose energy of purpose was second only to his own, and would lead her to investigate the States very thoroughly and describe her adventures, subsequently, in the saddle or on foot, in compact volumes.

His reveries were interrupted by the arrival of the steam-launch *Camilla* alongside of the *Black Star*. The little craft, upholstered with velvet and silk, and gleaming with brass, steel, silver, and polished woods, glided gracefully through the waters, her mission to welcome Professor Ashwell. The Union Jack fluttered at her masthead.

"Really this *is* kind!" said the guest, skipping nimbly on board, and shaking hands with his host.

Donald Belt, beaming with satisfaction, and feeling the eye of the *Black Star* to be upon him, presented Professor Ashwell to the party of gentlemen grouped on the deck.

The beauty bridled, and bit her lip. Surely the steam-launch should have been some fairy craft, adorned with flowers and silken canopies for her acceptance! "Lucky beggar!" quoth the actor, gloomily.

The lady traveller had her revenge for the slight thus put upon her own merit. She peered over the ship's side and made a note of the incident. She expressed grave doubts of the solidity of Professor Ashwell's scientific attainments ever afterwards.

The latter sped away, undisturbed by these envious ones. Disembarking, he was driven to the mansion on Tulip Place, where a cordial greeting awaited him from Mrs. Belt and Camilla.

The party of gentlemen dined with their host, and Professor Ash-

well noticed the addition of two guests. Old Mr. St. Nicholas, erect and dignified, was placed at Mrs. Belt's left hand, while the professor himself occupied the right. A foreigner, handsome, vivacious, and graceful, devoted his attention to Camilla farther down the table.

The recent voyager felt that his lines were cast in pleasant places. He partook of American delicacies as interpreted by a French *chéf* of unusual excellence, and served on a national dinner-set adorned by native artists and fabricated at Limoges. His soup was presented in a plate modelled in shape of the mountain laurel, with a green turtle exploring a Florida reef in the bottom, and an agreeable company of crabs and shrimps adorning the border. Salmon lost none of the delicacy of flavor that the red-snapper of the Gulf of Mexico chased a butterfly fish across the porcelain surface, nor game its richness that in discussing it he was required to contemplate a prairie chicken escaping a prairie fire, and a ptarmigan's bath in the Rocky Mountains.

There was a hum of conversation pervading the room, a glow of subdued light shed on rich and harmonious appointments, a beautiful woman, with snowy hair and startled eyes, seated at the head of the table.

Professor Ashwell glanced at Camilla, and bethought him of three gifts treasured in the depths of his portmanteau. Would not a young lady who had secured the antique bracelet at a London sale be pleased with such fruit of recent Egyptian explorations as a necklace of beads—onyx, agate, carnelian, garnet, and turquoise—long hidden in a stone jar in a cellar? Donald Belt was destined to receive a pack of Hindustani cards, in a carved ivory box, presented to Colonel Dashwood by a high-caste Brahmin, and consisting of eight suits of divers colors, the kings being mounted on elephants, and the viziers upon horses, tigers, and bulls. A tea-service of old Chelsea ware was intended to move the feminine enthusiasm of the hostess.

"I find your country very beautiful, mademoiselle," remarked the Count Della Stella, contemplating California quail feasting on grapes and grain, with a golden sky for a background, on his plate. "Will you make of me an American?"

"Our host is truly a representative man, and deserves imitation in other lands," said Professor Ashwell, with affability, a buffalo caught in a snow-storm, and surrounded by gray wolves and coyotes, glancing up at him, with baleful eye, from his plate.

"Yes," assented Mr. St. Nicholas, with an ironical smile.

The moment would have been propitious for an experienced hostess to speak, but Mrs. Belt was dumb.

CHAPTER VI.

A FLOWER BALL.

"*We are puppets, man in his pride, and beauty fair in her flower.*"—"Maud."

THAT season the last day of the year fell on a Thursday.

At eleven o'clock in the evening a carriage paused before number Ten Tulip Place, and a gentleman, enveloped in a cloak, alighted.

The gentleman was the Count Della Stella, and his equipage formed one of a file of vehicles extending the length of the street.

The house of Donald Belt presented an aspect of unusual animation, lights sparkled in every casement and shed abroad a glow from the effulgent illumination of the interior on the snow and ice of the pavement. A carpet had been spread from the entrance door to the curbstone, while a curtained canopy served to protect the rapidly arriving guests from the piercing wind as well as to frustrate public curiosity.

The count, traversing the carpet, in turn, was caught by a floating spray of roses which escaped from the wraps of a pretty blonde. Apologies, smiles, and the careful disentanglement of the garland resulted; an incident of trifling importance rendered impressive by the gentleman, by look, a gesture, the attitude of a willing captive.

These matters were second nature to him. Wrecked among the icebergs of an inhospitable zone, his bearing would have been chivalrous to the ladies, clad in fur, whose destiny it is to consider the seal and the walrus, rather than the ballroom roses.

Entering the marble vestibule, he found himself in an atmosphere of warmth, perfume, and light. His whole being expanded to these congenial influences, the cold and the darkness of an unfamiliar city were left outside. The scene charmed his senses the more that he tasted, in advance, the sweets of full possession. The kingdom was fair enough to warrant a certain triumph in the conquest.

He divested his form of the heavy military cloak in a convenient dressing-room, and surveyed his reflected image in a mirror critically, yet with satisfaction.

The invitations had been given out for a flower ball on this last night of the year, with the additional request that gentlemen should appear in costume.

The Count Della Stella personated Christopher Columbus. He had calculated on this effect, in advance, and his attire consisted of steel-gray silk fitting his shapely limbs with the accuracy of an acrobat's hose, and ribbed by the skill of French looms to resemble the links of chain-armor, while corselet of silvered pasteboard completed the illusion. He wore about his neck the heavy links of a gold chain, with a medallion attached, and a close ruff which framed his uncovered head and imparted a marked elegance to his whole appearance. Taking a furled banner in his hand, he sought his hostess.

The tiles of the vestibule, the lamp suspended by bronze chains, the larger vases containing shrubs, were tulips, iridized in metal, and enamelled in majolica to a semblance of the stately flower.

Donald Belt thus paid fitting tribute to the locality where he was permitted to reside, and heightened the prejudice of old Mr. St. Nicholas, the lawful cultivator of the bulb by inheritance.

Flowers bloomed everywhere on this occasion, from slender palms and velvet-leaved exotics lining the corridors, or flanking the broad stairway of carved oak, to the angles forming bowers of pink and white azaleas. Here the harvest of countless hothouses was massed in gigantic vases, placed on console, bracket, and chimney-piece, or freighted each window-ledge with a wealth of delicate fragrance and color. Roses clung to the velvet *portières* of doors, bloomed in gilded baskets, twined about the pedestals of chandeliers, formed pyramids at every turn, mingling their sweetness with hyacinth, mignonette, and violet in screens of ferns and smilax, and laid their richest tribute of trembling petals about the base of statues, spurned by the light foot of Echo holding a horn to an attentive ear, encircling a lost Pleiad searching vainly for her celestial sisters, as she floats through space on her cloud couch, herself a dream of the unfulfilled in Carrara marble.

The count entered a reception-room, where, with the delicate accessories of blue hangings and silver lace-work of decoration on ceiling and cornice enhancing the charms of her presence, Mrs. Belt received her guests, the numerous groups constantly claiming her attention effectually concealing any deficiency of warmth in her tone and manner.

The hostess personated a thistle. Her robe of silver-gray tulle, worn over satin of the same hue, was held in folds by the flower of silver, studded with diamond dewdrops. Sandals of gray satin shod her slender feet, the fan she carried was painted with the same device, and her white hair, rolled back from the tranquil and regular features, was crowned by a diadem formed of the stubborn weed in such fashion as to admit of a profusion of brilliants twinkling amidst the spikes of leaf and thorn.

"What a beautiful woman," thought the count, as he approached. "She is an alabaster lamp without oil. She needs kindling to flame by means of some emotion."

At the moment of his approach Donald Belt was engaged in conversation with his wife, and a visitor in the attire of the sixteenth century.

"I have transformed myself into Sebastian Cabot in honor of your ball, Mrs. Belt," said this cavalier, who manifested surprising gayety in the character assumed. "I am also a native of Bristol, you know."

Mrs. Belt smiled, and her glance strayed beyond Professor Ashwell to the Count Della Stella.

"Here comes Christopher Columbus, if I am not mistaken," she said, with unwonted animation.

The count bent low over her hand, while his caressing glance conveyed the subtle admiration of his thoughts.

"Cristoforo Colombo, I salute thee! Benissimo!" said Professor Ashwell, with ready good-humor.

The two gentlemen exchanged greetings. They had already met several times since the dinner-party beneath the same roof, where Professor Ashwell was established as a guest, while the count had become a daily visitor. Possibly each experienced a sentiment of surprise and annoyance to find the other had anticipated his own intention by appearing as the discoverer of America. In the feminine breast similar rivalry would have occasioned pique. In the world of science astronomers sometimes find their telescopes trained on the same unknown star.

A lady, leaning on the arm of her escort, interrupted the badinage elicited by the situation.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Belt! How deliciously your house lights up, Mr. Belt. Yes; I have here my brother, Mr. William St. Nicholas, as the Commodore Van Kortlandt. He always had a fondness for the sea, you know, so we must permit him to rule for one night, at least. *Bon soir, Monsieur le Comte.* How good of you to have discovered us, at all! I always make a pilgrimage to your native Genoa just to thank you for the deed, in the name of all America, as I pause before that marble statue of Columbus. And Professor Ashwell as Sebastian Cabot! This is too kind. We feel ourselves to be almost unworthy of so much attention from the old world; do we not, Mr. Belt? Where are Amerigo Vespucci and Ponce de Leon, and all the rest of them? What have you done with my boy, Mrs. Belt?"

Thus spoke Mrs. Monteith, voluble and animated, as usual, extending to the gratified Donald Belt the tardy approbation of her presence,

at the precise date when his daughter inherited a fortune. The coincidence of events wounded him, as it had done his wife and daughter on the occasion of the call, but he accepted the situation, finding in it the guinea stamp on his own gold-piece of position.

Mrs. Monteith had laid aside her black garments, and appeared, a presence suave, delicate, and distinguished, as a heart's-ease. Her robe of purple velvet was relieved by lighter draperies of lilac crêpe, fastened with clusters of the large, richly tinted pansy, which also decked her bodice and the braids of her brown hair. A necklace of dull gold and amethysts encircled her throat, and similar links were wound about her slender arms above the long lavender gloves, embroidered with a pansy on the wrist, while a gilded chalice held her bouquet of the same flowers.

"Your son is receiving with Camilla in the ballroom," replied Mrs. Belt, her glance mechanically noting the details of Mrs. Monteith's toilette. "May I take you to him?"

"Oh, no!" protested the guest. "You have so many people to manage here."

"Allow me," interposed Donald Belt, offering his arm.

The master of the house was not insensible to the consideration he would reap by the occasion. The sheep of this world huddle together, helplessly, under similar circumstances, awaiting a leader, to scamper in mad pursuit of some fresh pastime. Mrs. Monteith was such a leader. She required no management, having fallen into the grasp of Donald Belt as the partridge, all roasted, from the heavens. The gratification of the man who courts public applause and craves association with the best class within his range permeated his being.

Professor Ashwell, after some playful argument with Christopher Columbus on his right of precedence, placed himself on the other side of Mrs. Monteith, and, with her brother following, the party sought the ballroom, and the presence of the actual hostess, Camilla.

William St. Nicholas had lent himself to the spirit of the occasion with unusual animation, and his costume of Oloffe the Dreamer had inspired his mother with countless souvenirs of the earliest settlements of Mannahata, and the neighboring shores of New Jersey and Long Island.

The Flemish doublet and hose, the broad hat, the cavalier collar, were worn with a certain dignity, while the bristling mustache served as an effectual disguise.

Count Della Stella separated himself from the group by an adroit movement. He had no intention of entering the ballroom either with Sebastian Cabot or the Commodore Van Kortlandt. He permitted himself to glance after them with a swift gleam of irritation,

disdain, and even animosity in his fine eyes, as he bit his mustache.

The arrangement of the interior was harmonious, and by the judicious mingling of light and shade imparted the illusion of greater space than actually existed. Several smaller rooms, linked together by archways, draped with silk curtains, and furnished with inlaid cabinets, gilded chairs and sofas, in a profusion of modern luxury, opened beyond on a library, lofty, dark, and obscured rather than illuminated by hanging lamps of Venetian brass, which cast subdued reflections on the carved bookcases, the embossed leather of the walls, and the sculptured reliefs of a chimney-piece, flanked by a collection of rare Moresco pottery on shelf and bracket.

A tea-room, vermilion-red in hue, and lighted by means of painted lanterns, with fans, gongs, and umbrellas suspended in the four corners, and pagoda-shaped cabinets, adorned with dragons, containing a great variety of eggshell china, had on either side a tiny chamber, sombre brown in tint, with golden reflections, enshrining the Daimio bronze and Satsuma ware of Japan. Here the votary of the fragrant herb might linger to partake of the favorite beverage, whether served with cream, lemon, or sweetmeats.

Beyond was the dining-room, with its massive buffets, wainscot, and columns of polished wood, and chandelier of crystal.

The count had followed Mrs. Monteith to the picture-gallery, which gave immediate access to the ballroom, and here paused, with a swift glance of disapprobation at the party. Why did his dislike concentrate, as it were, on the stalwart back of William St. Nicholas? Sensitive to impressions, rapid in conviction, with a mingling of the emotional and the subtle in his own nature, the count might have been unable to define his sudden aversion to these strangers. His eye roved along the gallery without heeding the pictures grouped on the walls, panels, and garlands of roses interlacing the art of Gérome and Meissonier with that of Gifford or Carl Becker. Far above his head the blue vault of ceiling was defined by a circle of gas-jets, mellowed by colored shades, which shed rays down on the inlaid floor.

He turned aside into the conservatory, where, in the twilight made by an occasional silvery globe, broad-leaved plants drooped over the fountain's brimming basin, while chrysanthemums rose in tiers of snow against the crystal walls of partition. Farther on the shimmer of rainbow plumage indicated an aviary.

The ballroom was dazzling with light, and already full, although dancing had not commenced. At an earlier hour Camilla had made a little mocking reverence to her own reflected image, and laughed: "Yes; it is delightful to be young, happy, and rich."

The ballroom was her surprise and triumph for the town. The apartment, built in the rear of the mansion during the recent absence of the family, was rich with gilding and white enamel. Three chandeliers sparkled with a profusion of wax tapers, while bracket candelabra, supported by golden cupids, lined the walls between tapestries of silk embroideries, cream-yellow in tone. Above the entrance door the gallery for musicians was screened by yellow roses; while at the farther extremity of the room two gigantic mirrors, decorated for a grand duchess by a Florentine artist, seemed to lure the visitor to their depths in the reflection of the brilliant scene, between columns of slender bamboo, lotus, fern, and quivering myosotis, painted on the margin.

The first object noticed on entering the ballroom was a pavilion of purple velvet, the curtains heavily fringed with gold, and looped back to reveal the Sun, seated on his throne, with Phaeton standing on the step below, and a priestess still lower, on a level with the guests of the evening. In the back of the pavilion a scene represented the Earth as an orb, on the right hand, peopled with men and animals, and the Sea on the left, with Doris and her daughters drying their green hair on a bank of the foreground, while Tritons sounded their shell trumpets in the adjacent waves. A glow, as of carbuncles and rubies, was shed upon the God of Day, crowned with a gold coronet, his blond hair and beard floating over his royal mantle of amber and purple, holding a glittering sceptre in his grasp.

"I believe we have succeeded in astonishing the natives," whispered the priestess.

"We shall get into the daily papers," echoed Phaeton.

"I say, Miss Belt, may I dance after a while?" pleaded the Sun, speaking in a muffled voice by reason of his false beard.

"Of course you may dance," retorted the priestess.

She was clad in white satin, as Priestess of the Sun, embroidered with the helianthus, her tunic of yellow lace attached to draperies of deep-brown plush by means of a large sunflower and trailing leaves. Her well-shaped shoulders and firm, white throat rose above a wreath of leaves which decked her corsage, while her hair was confined beneath a full-blown *soleil* of gold. She carried a companion blossom by the long stem in her fingers.

Camilla was looking her best. Excitement, blended with triumph, dilated her gray eyes beneath the level brows, and curved her mobile lips in a ready smile of welcome to the rapidly increasing throng. All the world was present, as Camilla was aware, to bow, praise, scan, and criticise the deportment of the Belt household on this occasion. Camilla did not fear their judgment. She was prepared to amuse and receive all these people, using a prodigal gener-

osity to attain the end. Her composure had in it a touch of insolence which her father did not find unbecoming.

"How wonderfully well you do these things over here," Professor Ashwell observed to Mrs. Monteith, as they crossed the ballroom to the steps of the pavilion to greet Camilla.

"Do not flatter us too much," disclaimed the widow, laughing. "We are only imported *articles de Paris*, every one of us."

Young Phaeton, in tunic of golden silk, and mantle of cerulean blue, an embossed cuirass on his breast representing the hero driving the chariot of the Sun to the discomfiture of a universe, made his little speech:

"I have come to the temple of my father, the Sun, to beg to be allowed to drive his chariot."

"Take care the horses do not run away with you," admonished Mrs. Monteith, imparting a dexterous maternal adjustment to his mantle.

William St. Nicholas shook hands with Camilla.

"I need not remind you, Miss Belt, that when I had the vision at the foot of the tree on the Jersey shore which gave me the name I bear of Oloffe the Dreamer, and the good St. Nicholas appeared to me, smoking the pipe that created the cloudy semblance of spires and roofs, I also beheld your ball of this evening," he said, with assumed gravity.

Camilla glanced up at him quickly. Was he ridiculing her ostentation?

"I have a plan of my early home, the Bowerie, in my wallet, which I must show you later," he added, jestingly.

"Are you fond of the old-fashioned haunts of the town?" she inquired.

She recalled the locality where she had seen him during her morning walk. At the same time a sudden doubt came to her if the sunflower head-dress were not absurd.

"No; I cannot say that I am," was the careless rejoinder.

At this juncture the Count Della Stella appeared in the opposite doorway. He was alone; and, as he approached, by a skilful movement he unfurled the banner carried in his left hand, as if about to plant the standard of Spain on a virgin soil.

The stranger became the cynosure of all eyes; there was a flutter of movement and questioning in the feminine ranks; men smiled.

"How theatrical!" murmured Mrs. Monteith, behind her fan.

"One has the right to be theatrical at a fancy ball," said William St. Nicholas.

Camilla changed color perceptibly when she read the eloquent meaning in the count's eyes. Did he find favor with the sole wom-

an he sought to please by appearing as Christopher Columbus? How beautiful a knight he was! The corselet and mediæval armor, the enfolding banner, separated him from the elements of a modern ballroom. He was there for her sake. He reminded her of Lohengrin telling the wondering Elsa that he comes from a far country in the echo of the swan's song.

A few groups of dancers had begun to glide over the floor towards the decorated mirrors. Suddenly a bell sounded a single stroke for midnight, clear, silvery, and vibrating, and the music ceased. A light glowed in the conservatory, and forth flitted a tiny creature, child and fairy, shimmering with tinsel frost on wing and white robe, a wreath of snowdrops on her head.

"I wish you a happy new year, ladies and gentlemen," she said, her little pipe suggestive of the footlights.

The New Year, distributing bouquets of yellow rosebuds, with ivory tablets bearing Camilla's monogram on the cover attached, to the ladies, vanished as she had come.

There was a momentary pause for the interchange of greetings, and then the younger hostess arranged a quadrille of honor, as a suitable opening for the revelry in store. Mrs. Belt and Professor Ashwell stood opposite Mrs. Monteith and the Count Della Stella. Other sets were speedily formed, until the mirrors gave back a parterre of human flowers; Hindustan having sent her Marigold, Egypt her Heliotrope, Assyria her Water-lily, Persia her Pomegranate Blossom, to mingle in the mazes of the dance, with the Iris of Juno, the Myrtle of Venus Aphrodite, the Olive and Violet of Minerva, in satin and silk of delicate, pearly lustre, billowing in waves over damask, brocade, and velvet.

Donald Belt, surveying the scene with his smile of public benevolence, became aware of the entrance of an eccentric figure. This was a man wearing knee-breeches of olive velvet, shoes with silver buckles, a black coat with wide skirts and large gilt buttons, a cocked hat, and a queue of gray hair. He carried a cane which reached as high as his chin, with a silver knob, and a bundle of papers under his arm. A gray beard concealed the lower portion of his countenance.

He advanced to his host, and tendered his card, on which was inscribed, in old-style type, the name of Diederich Knickerbocker.

"The fame of your entertainment has reached even me, you perceive," said Diederich Knickerbocker, surveying the scene with amusement.

"I am proud to welcome you, sir," said Donald Belt.

"A very pretty effect. I congratulate you," added the affable Diederich.

Mrs. Monteith, chatting with her partner, in the interval of dancing, contrived to raise her lorgnette and inspect the new-comer.

"I prefer Naples to Rome," she said, lowering her glass once more. "I should like to retire to the Island of Ischia and write sonnets—become a second Vittoria Colonna."

"Madame is that already," replied the count.

"Of course I wish to see Niagara as soon as possible," Professor Ashwell was saying, at the same moment, to Mrs. Belt. "What astonishes me are the vast distances in your great country."

Mrs. Belt assented coldly. She was a silent woman who posed well in magnificent raiment. Perhaps she was wise in refraining from too frequent speech. She was not even a good listener, because intelligent attention necessitates a sentiment of interest in speaker or subject, and Mrs. Belt manifested neither requirement. Professor Ashwell, assuming his cheerful mien of the evening hour with the costume of Sebastian Cabot, was conscious of a chilling vacuity, as if his own footsteps echoed through an empty hall. He was a trifle incensed, and glanced with some severity at the pure profile beside him.

In the meanwhile Phœbus Apollo and Phaeton had deserted their posts in the velvet pavilion, despite the warnings of the inexorable priestess, and, slipping into a convenient dressing-room, divested themselves of their celestial habiliments.

"I tell you what, my boy, I'm going in for Forget-me-not," remarked Phœbus Apollo, otherwise Willy Monteith's bosom friend, Mr. Sam Hardinge, assuming the costume of a Fool, with cap and bells.

"I must pay my addresses to the priestess still," said Phaeton, issuing forth from the hands of a valet as the Marquis de Lafayette, in velvet smallclothes, with lace ruffles and a powdered wig.

He had sacrificed his mustache on the shrine of pleasure, not without a pang of regret, for he held much to the dignity of manhood thus acquired.

"It's no use," said Sam Hardinge, the scoffer. "You are too young and downy for Miss Belt even to flirt with."

Willy regained the ballroom as the opening quadrille terminated, and hastened to proffer his gold snuffbox to Mr. Diederich Knickerbocker, who accepted a pinch with all possible gravity.

"Miss Belt, you must give me the first waltz," cried this audacious young marquis, seeking her in the crowd.

"Pardon. This is my waltz," and the count stood on the other side in an attitude of entreaty.

Camilla elevated her eyebrows.

"If I must choose between France and Italy, I prefer Italy," she

said. "I believe I had already given the Count Della Stella my word."

"When Miss Belt gives her word it is a sacred pledge," added the count, with an emphasis and precision of utterance arguing a frequent repetition of the phrase.

"There is Mademoiselle Aimée, who is a much better waltzer than I," said Camilla, as she was whirled away, with the arm of Christopher Columbus encircling her waist.

The Marquis de Lafayette, thus foiled, observed Mademoiselle Aimée Rauvier for the first time, and was reconciled. Before he had made two turns of the room he decided that Aimée was the prettiest girl present, and was already more than half in love with her.

Aimée represented her native Edelweiss, and Camilla had bestowed much attention on her costume. The narrow little gown of white velvet, with the overskirt of downy texture, in semblance of the pointed petals of a flower, was sufficiently brief to reveal two coquettish satin slippers, adorned with an edelweiss as a rosette. The graceful head rose from a quaint ruff of kindred points, and was surmounted by a helmet-shaped blossom, which rendered the wearer charming.

Willy Monteith, who seemed boyish by reason of Camilla's seniority of a year, felt awaken within him all the instincts of the *preux chevalier* he represented, as he bore Aimée along on his arm, like a snowflake.

"Are you fond of dancing, mademoiselle?" he inquired, with quite unnecessary tenderness, bending over the flower-cap.

"Oh, yes, monsieur," replied Aimée, raising her sparkling eyes to his face with a dangerous instinct of maidenly coquetry.

As for Camilla, she abandoned herself to the rhythmical movement of the music as the bather in tropical seas drifts, almost without volition, on the translucent waves, where sky and luminous atmosphere are so infiltrated and fused as to seem part of the liquid element. She was alone with the Count Della Stella, the glow of myriads of lights dazzling her eyes, and the breath of dying roses all about her. Was she happy, or troubled? She could not determine. The present was her own.

Her partner paused near the entrance to the conservatory.

"Allow me to get you an ice," he urged.

"No," said Camilla. "I am hostess to-night. All these ladies wish to dance with Christopher Columbus. I must present you to Miss Pyle."

The count bowed low before the blonde whose spray of roses had caught his cloak in the entrance.

Miss Pyle smiled, bridled, and accepted his arm. Her dress made

her resemble a China shepherdess, the slender bodice, full paniers, and pink satin skirt being wreathed in garlands of roses, while a string of rose-tinted pearls encircled her throat.

Camilla regarded the ranks of dowagers a trifle defiantly. These were seated against the wall, where they formed a margin of poppies, with lace overdresses or marguerites in black and white draperies. The count had claimed her with unmistakable *empressement* before all these people. She had not accorded him the right. She decided to avoid dancing with him any more this evening, as the ostrich hides its head in the sand.

Mrs. Southby floated up to her with outstretched hands, in her dress of an Orchid, spangled with mauve and purple, flesh-color and crimson, and shot with yellow gleamings, as if still a plant to lead the votary to madness. Her corsage and sash formed a green calyx, whence depended eccentric trimmings, acquiring here the shape of a bird's wing, and there the form of some insect. Opals shimmered amidst her laces.

Mrs. Southby was a lady who enjoyed a reputation for being fast. Her interest in her nursery consisted in attiring her children like the royal babies of Spain, or the daughters of the Princess of Wales. Beautiful in early youth, she held tenaciously to a conspicuous position by frequently changing the color of her hair. As the Orchid her tresses possessed the metallic lustre of the bleached blonde.

"I am dying to know the count, Miss Belt, and have him to dinner," she exclaimed, with effusion.

"Have you not met him yet? I will bring him to you after this dance," rejoined Camilla.

Mrs. Southby regarded her archly.

"How good of you to lure him over to us simple republicans, Miss Belt."

"I did not lure him," said Camilla, curtly. "He came on his own account."

Here Mrs. Monteith slipped her hand through Camilla's arm and whispered,

"I have a great favor to ask of you."

The Orchid fell back on the rank of dowagers, to which she dreaded being relegated, and drawled, *sotto voce*,

"She is certainly the bluntest creature."

"She has no style," echoed a Peony, speaking in discreetly lowered accents.

"Style is unnecessary when a girl has ten millions in her own right," sighed a Daffodil dame.

"I wish you to give my brother a waltz," said Mrs. Monteith,

confidentially. "I am most anxious about him. He cares so little for our world, and one dreads the snares of that other, you know."

Camilla consulted her tablets, and consented.

"Professor Ashwell, I hope you have not forgotten our quadrille," she said, playfully, as she approached a group of gentlemen.

"Bless me! So this is the hostess?" said Diederich Knickerbocker, in a falsetto key, assumed to disguise his natural voice. "You should give the precedence to natives, young lady; but if you will not be my partner, I must e'en be content to serve as your *vis-à-vis.*"

Suiting word to action, he led forth a buxom lady, simulating a corn-flower, and began to dance with admirable agility, now whisking deftly to the right and left, and again executing complicated steps in his buckled shoes, to the diversion of the company.

Why was Camilla so frank and gay in her bearing towards Professor Ashwell? Why did she refrain from glancing at the Count Della Stella, as he led the Rose through the figures of the quadrille? Professor Ashwell was a genial guest, and it had not occurred to the daughter of the house to regard him in the light of a suitor.

The Marquis de La Fayette had partaken of an ice, in company with the Edelweiss maiden, and was wandering through the fragrant twilight of the conservatory. Willy had elicited the timid recital of Aimée's life in the *haute cité* of Geneva, and, in turn, confided many interesting details of his own college career, including a boat-race with Yale. Willy was at home everywhere, and knew everybody. He was a favorite with the ladies at an age when he appeared more boy than man, but he discovered a novel charm in the voice, attitude, and manner of the French girl, which, by means of a naïve deference, and a subtile inference, rather than open flattery, made him satisfied with himself. The merriment of Sam Hardinge's sisters degenerated into mere schoolroom chaff in comparison with the discreet appreciation of Aimée Rauvier.

As for the latter, a sweet tumult of agitation intoxicated her senses, lending softness to her smile. Phaeton, in all the glory of cerulean mantle, had deigned to notice her, when he descended from his high estate. She was elated, surprised, and very happy

Willy pleaded for an edelweiss to keep as a souvenir of the dance, but Aimée was far too discreet to give him one.

"I'm going to show you my Alpine album some day, mademoiselle. I gathered every flower myself, from the Bernina to the St. Gothard. You know the meaning of sharing an edelweiss?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur," and Aimée averted her face.

A voice intruded on these subdued questions and tremulous re-

sponses, with a cold inflection of displeasure perceptible in the tones.

"My dear child, I have been searching for you this half-hour," said Mrs. Monteith. "The Hardinges have arrived, a bevy of dandelions gone to seed, and expect you to pay them some attention. They are too lovely in their balls of down."

"Mademoiselle Rauvier is kindly improving my French accent," said Willy, mischievously "I am sure she finds me perfectly beastly, as a linguist."

"Oh, no," protested Aimée, laughing

Mrs. Monteith did not smile.

"Mrs. Belt requires your services, mademoiselle," she said, haughtily.

The girl shrank and trembled. Her air-castle toppled down in the presence of Willy's mother. She was not used to being regarded like that. She bowed, and slipped away to shed a few hot, incomprehensible tears before rejoining the company.

"How could you put her down like that, mamma?" exclaimed Willy, indignantly.

"Do you mean the companion, darling?" demanded Mrs. Monteith, coolly.

"I wish you would not treat me quite so much like a boy," fumed the Marquis de La Fayette.

Thus the moments wove links of association in Camilla's ballroom, separating, by a breath, a glance, a note wafted from the musicians' gallery, with equal caprice of fatality.

"You will find me wretchedly out of practice, Miss Belt," said William St. Nicholas, who had been dancing conscientiously all the evening, to the marked satisfaction of his sister.

What was the danger threatening him? Camilla pondered on Mrs. Monteith's mysterious allusion, as she placed her hand on his shoulder. She met his glance full in her eyes. The look was one of mingled weariness and contempt. He colored, and bit his lip. He had not anticipated her reading his face quite so plainly, just then.

"You are generous to try to amuse so many people, Miss Belt," he said, abstractedly yet apologetically. "An artist should paint the scene."

Camilla drew herself up, and her nostrils quivered.

"Confess that you dislike sunflowers, Mr. St. Nicholas," she said, aware of the bristling spikes of her head-dress in close proximity to the chin of her partner

"On the contrary, I like sunflowers."

Camilla did not abandon herself to the rhythm of motion, as with

the Count Della Stella; she resisted the pressure of her partner's arm, for sudden anger flamed in her veins, and caused her feet to drag.

"I fancy we do not keep step together very well," said William St. Nicholas, in a tone of dissatisfaction.

"I fancy not," retorted Camilla, dryly.

"You are tired, perhaps?" deprecatingly.

"A little," and she paused.

"The Strauss measure had more *élan* than Lanner's," he added.

"I prefer Strauss," said Camilla.

What right had William St. Nicholas to look at her like that? The old conviction stole over her that the relative positions of the two families remained unchanged, in spite of Mrs. Monteith's suave overtures. Her ball, with the flowers and lights, formed part of mere vulgar ostentation in his estimation.

"Miss Belt, at least allow me to take you in to supper," he urged, with increased irritation of tone. "I am a mighty trencherman, as the Commodore Van Kortlandt, and have raised the oyster to the highest epicurean dignity, in competition with Philadelphia's terrapin, Baltimore's soft-shelled crab, and Washington's canvas-back duck."

She bowed assent, and sought the supper-room.

The Count Della Stella had paused near a buffet beside Willy Monteith and his friend Sam Hardinge.

"Who is the young lady, the Rose?" he inquired.

"Oil," responded Sam Hardinge, who was discussing lobster-salad.

"Oil?" repeated the foreigner.

"He means her family came from oil," kindly explained Willy Monteith, with the condescension of Young America, under such circumstances.

"The grandfather struck oil in Pennsylvania," added Sam Hardinge.

Count Della Stella smiled, and caressed his mustache. He was familiar with the term, as applied to suddenly acquired wealth, even at Rome.

Oloffe the Dreamer exerted himself to amuse Camilla, and without success. Her politeness became more and more studied, and his jests forced. He was annoyed in his very instincts of courtesy. Conscious of disapproving of Camilla in her gaudy costume, he had not intended to betray the sentiment to the object of his thoughts. He made a final effort to thaw the ice of constrained intercourse.

"I like to believe we were destined to become friends, as we were born on the same day," he said, gravely.

Here was a fitting occasion for a sweet-tempered woman to melt into smiles of ready forgiveness. Camilla did nothing of the kind. William St. Nicholas had proved a bramble in her path this evening. He had done his best to put her out of conceit even with her own toilet; an unpardonable offence on the part of a man.

"By all means, let us be friends. I am ready for the cotillion, count. You will join us, I trust, Mr. St. Nicholas," with studied indifference.

The cotillion commenced at two o'clock, led by the Count Della Stella and Willy Monteith. Diederich Knickerbocker looked on with bright, amused eyes. Mrs. Monteith sat beside Professor Ashwell on a velvet sofa.

Camilla noticed that the Commodore Van Kortlandt was not among the dancers; was, indeed, in the act of bidding Mrs. Belt good-night. What did it matter? Let him go.

The ladies agreed there never was such a leader as the count, endowed with so much spirit, invention, and inexhaustible amiability. His very look lent wings to their feet, as he grouped them together as flowers, converted the gentlemen into wild animals, by means of masks, and showered gifts upon his panting subjects. Through it all, the merry hours given variety by his skill, he kept the thread of a separate interest with Camilla, until such time as the dancers drooped, and day dawned, with the final supplication:

"Will you give me an answer in a month? It is a paradise, your country, but I cannot linger here too long. I am a soldier."

"Very well. In a month," replied Camilla.

The music hummed in her ears, the soft draperies of the other dancers swept about her. Many things may happen in a month.

He seemed to divine the evasion of her thought. His face darkened, and his eyes glowed with a sombre fire.

"Afterward!" he murmured low. "Ah, afterward I do not care!"

Mrs. Southby said to a neighbor:

"What a flirt Alice St. Nicholas is! She always was, you know. Oh, yes, a thorough-paced coquette, if one ever lived. Only look at her now, indulging in a scientific conversation with Professor Ashwell! She is persuading the hapless man of her profound interest in the molar tooth of the Mastodon Avernensis."

The Rose from the oil country, Miss Pyle, had for a partner a Turk, in the person of a young man with a serious countenance, who gave his whole mind to the business in hand, following steadily the brilliant and erratic lead of Count Della Stella. Miss Pyle was listless, and her glance constantly sought Camilla or Christopher Columbus, as if she were absorbed in some perplexing meditation.

In the dawn the Turk took his way homeward in the direction of

the neighboring city of Brooklyn, weary, yet elated at having attended Miss Belt's flower ball. "I must tell the girls all about it," he soliloquized, with masculine superiority to the sisters who had not been invited.

In the dawn Donald Belt surveyed the dishevelled flower-garlands, the waning tapers, the *débris* of the feast, with satisfaction.

"Diederich Knickerbocker was old Mr. St. Nicholas," he said, winking slyly at the flower-mirrors. "First a dinner-party, and then a ball. I thought we should land that trout, sooner or later."

In the dawn Camilla fell asleep, without the aid of the poison-draught necessary to fashion's jaded nerves. She seemed to step from the light of her own ballroom into outer darkness, drawn onward against her will, until in denser shadow, whether of looming rock or lofty dome of some vast cathedral she could not discern, she was clasped to a man's breast, and a face bent to seek her own. Then a voice proclaimed, where all else was vague, tremulous, changeful:

"Under the standard of Spain!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE NOTE OF AN OLD VIOLIN.

"When the low music makes a dusk of sound
About us, and the viol or far-off horn
Swells out above it like a wind forlorn
That wanders, seeking something never found,
What phantom in your brain, on what dim ground,
Traces its shadowy lines!"—SILL.

WHEN William St. Nicholas appeared at the luncheon-table next day — a meal serving as breakfast for three members of the family on this occasion — it was apparent to all that he was out of sorts.

Rallied by his sister on his bad-humor, he retorted that a ball, where one poisons one's self with supper, is sufficient excuse for a headache.

"I escaped before any lady could request me to receive her gifts, and stand nailed against the wall until daybreak," he added.

"Providence intended our Willy for the leader of an orchestra," said Mrs. Monteith, reverting to her favorite sarcasm.

"I never saw a more jolly ball," cried Willy, the younger, blithely.

His mother eyed him askance.

"Grandmamma should have seen you in the character of Phaeton," she said. "As the Marquis de La Fayette you were simply a silly fop."

"When? In what way?" exclaimed the youth, betrayed into indignation, and then repenting of his warmth with a sudden flush of consciousness.

"Mammon certainly outdid himself," remarked Mr. St. Nicholas, in his driest tone. "What a display of luxury that house is! I suppose his pictures were selected for him by a connoisseur, as he can know little about them. For my part, a few American artists, and our family portraits by Sir Peter Lely and Sir Joshua Reynolds, with a few proof engravings, have always sufficed for my modest requirements."

"So you were present, grandpapa," hinted Willy Monteith, slyly. "I thought Mr. Diederich Knickerbocker resembled you."

"Hush, you young rascal!" retorted Mr. St. Nicholas, in an undertone.

"I am aware your grandpapa attended the ball last night," said Mrs. St. Nicholas, calmly. "He did not consult me, but I suppose he is old enough to know his own mind."

The birdlike features of the mistress of the house acquired additional sharpness, while the smile on her thin and withered lips revealed the patience and discretion acquired by experience. From her standpoint of judgment the old husband seated opposite may have been but a poor creature, after all, with many paltry masculine foibles and inconsistencies. His outward aspect fulfilled all the requirements of the book of Ecclesiasticus: "As the clear light is upon the holy candlestick, so is the beauty of the face in ripe age." In the soul of the wife, mingling with the regret and resignation of maturity, was a profound, underlying scepticism, not devoid of personal resentment, although she would not have characterized the sentiment by that name. She did not believe in his fondness for Horace or Virgil. She discerned in his cultivation of the tulip a certain vanity, desirous of aping Lipsius or John Barclay, as a learned man refreshing himself after study by contemplation of the gorgeous flower, and an effort to perpetuate the extravagance of the Dutch and Viennese merchants in first bringing the costly bulb from Adrianople and the plains of Jaffa.

Mrs. St. Nicholas occupied her own rooms in the old mansion on Tulip Place, while Mr. St. Nicholas enjoyed his wing of the house undisturbed, spending much of the night in reading, as a light sleeper, when not out late at his club. In her day she had recognized she had a place to fill, and if she received, with all possible formality, certain coquettish widows and gay belles of a season, her own face darker and harsher from contrast with their fair and dimpled loveliness, no complaint had escaped her lips. The whim of last evening, harmless and natural as it had been, was not the first of a similar kind. Possibly the recollection of those other balls, and the pangs of doubt she had suffered when her own heart was young, and capable of keen pain, brought that enigmatical smile to her lips, and a sudden gleam of light to her faded eyes.

The old lady kept in a jewel-case a collection of ornaments, which she would not permit to be separated during her lifetime. When her daughter married, she showed these gems to the giddy and romantic girl. "These are presents from your father," she explained. "I call them conscience-money. I never wear them, but they have been given to me at periods of excessive amiability on his part. Live on good terms with your husband, my dear. In our world scandal should be avoided."

The head of the house respected his wife, and was aware that her line of conduct was to be relied upon, in advance, in any emergency of duty which was likely to befall her. At the same time he permitted himself an indulgence of self-complacency to the extent of believing he humored her prejudices as few men would do, and served as a model of forbearance, on many occasions. Their union had been one of family interests; hence their mutual reluctance to influence the choice of the son.

"Your mother disapproves of us for countenancing the sewing-machine man," he said, laughing. "The ball was immensely fine, and when I saw the carriages arriving, I remembered that costume of Diederich Knickerbocker. I have not worn the clothes for ten years, and my figure has not altered in the least."

He spoke with the satisfaction of well-preserved maturity.

"I should prefer not to encourage these people by visiting them," replied Mrs. St. Nicholas. "I wish Alice was a little more particular about her associates.

"Every one was there, mamma," protested Mrs. Monteith, cheerfully. "The Belts have the celebrated English savant, Professor Ashwell, visiting them, so why should not we? We must have him here to meet some really good people, and we ladies should get up a series of drawing-room lectures, just to convince him that American women are not so fearfully frivolous as they imagine *outre-mer*."

"Are you desirous of persuading him of your superior intellect?" queried William St. Nicholas.

"Of course," asseverated Mrs. Monteith, her voice rising in a little inflection of enthusiasm. "I am confident he believes that we belong to the decent middle classes of retired tradespeople."

"What difference does it make what he believes?" said William St. Nicholas, whose mood was perverse. "He may consider me a wild Indian, if he likes, and go home and write a book all about us, with the pleasing title of 'Five Minutes in New York Society,' or, 'A Fresh Glimpse of American Institutions,' or, 'A Scamper Across the Rocky Mountains.'"

"Is he really like common mortals, do you suppose?" said Willy, the younger. "Perhaps he answers the cook, when she asks at what hour the dinner shall be served, like the astronomer, immersed in speculation on the return of a comet—the twenty-seventh of September, 1915."

"I can see William did not enjoy the ball," said Mrs. St. Nicholas, with marked elation.

"No; I should think not," he assented, briefly.

"Why?" inquired Mrs. Monteith, innocently.

The brother, avoiding her eye, peeled an orange, and proffered the fruit to his mother.

"I suppose he found the people too vulgar. Your brother has always been accustomed to good associations," said Mrs. St. Nicholas.

"I did not find the people at all vulgar," he replied, preparing a second orange with deliberation. "I confess that I was bored."

"The girl appeared very well, I must say," remarked Mr. St. Nicholas.

"I do not admire her taste in dress," said William.

"True. I did not care for that sunflower business," supplemented the parent. "The mother was perfection."

"I am told her father was the village shoemaker in her native place," added Mrs. St. Nicholas, briskly, who acquired a surprising amount of gossip at all times.

"From cobbler's bench to palace is an easy transition in our country, in this day," said Mr. St. Nicholas, shaking his head.

"I always enjoy masculine criticisms on the toilette," said Mrs. Monteith. "You make yourselves so deliciously absurd when you try to be wise about a woman's raiment. The embroidered border of helianthus on Camilla Belt's robe was a triumph of skill."

"So was the *soleil* in her hair, I suppose, only there was a good deal of it," said William St. Nicholas, with a somewhat forced laugh.

"Camilla Belt evidently offended you last night," said Mrs. Monteith, in a tone of quiet conviction.

"Offended me? What a preposterous idea, my dear Alice! She was a very civil hostess. The poor girl could not be expected to galvanize her sober countrymen to skip about like that foreign fellow."

"Foreign fellow?" repeated Mrs. St. Nicholas. "Why, who was he?"

"Uncle Willy means an Italian count, grandmamma," explained Willy, the younger. "All the ladies are wild about him, already. I don't see that the figures he introduced into the cotillion were so much better than Sam's, but, of course, they were imported, and that makes all the difference."

"I should suppose Sam's figures might be good enough for the Belts," observed Mrs. St. Nicholas, sententiously. "How well I remember Sam's great-aunt at the ball where she met Lord de Clyffe. She wore a slip of India mull over blue taffetas, and her arms were perfect."

"A foreign fellow, meaning the Count Azzolino Della Stella, beautiful as the Apollo Belvedere," exclaimed Mrs. Monteith. Then

changing her tone, she added: "If Camilla Belt did not offend you, come to the reception at the Meerschaum Club this evening."

The family had risen from the table. William St. Nicholas looked out of the window.

"You must excuse me," he retorted. "Take your own son, madame, and improve his mind. To mingle with my peers again to-night would be piling the last straw on the camel's burden."

"All right!" assented Willy, the younger. "Are we going with the Belts?"

"No, my dear," said his mother, with a cold gleam of suspicion in her eyes. "The *séance* would not interest you."

Willy made a mutinous grimace.

"The waves of fresh influence that sweep over the feminine intelligence are marvellous," said the uncle, meditatively. "Your last craze was for hospital-nursing and prison-visiting. You held your own theories respecting capital punishment, if I am not mistaken. Before that you wished to walk a hundred miles or so a day, by way of gentle exercise. I think I remember a date when you seriously meditated carving your own furniture, Mrs. Monteith, and hammering brass-work, as a pastime. Now we are to hear of nothing save Paleontology. I presume the dodo will soon decorate the drawing-room, and you women will trim your bonnets with fossil bones, as a delicate compliment to Professor Ashwell."

"Don't!" protested Mrs. Monteith. "When you try to be witty you are too dreadful."

Half an hour later William St. Nicholas looked in on his mother. He wore a heavy coat, and was drawing a pair of fur-lined gloves over his hands and wrists.

Mrs. St. Nicholas was already ensconsed in her favorite arm-chair in the bow-window of her morning-room, a post of observation overlooking the street, and she held the latest newspaper outspread on her knee.

A few books comprised her library—a Bible, a Prayer-book, Thomas à Kempis, "Voices of Comfort," and a volume of Lenten sermons. Apart from these safe guides the daily journal furnished ample mental pabulum. Mrs. St. Nicholas was, by instinct, a skilful and ardent reader of the news. Her experienced glance swept the field, and divined where the choicest tidbits of items were to be found. The calendar of any current week was enlivened by the promised advent of an interesting sheet, fresh from the press. The most acceptable gift possible to bestow upon her was a periodical, while her keen scent for news would have enabled her to extract the kernel of fact in telegram or leader, guided by the intuition of

genius. Her usual formula after a surfeit of general information was: "I don't know what the world is coming to!"

Her son invariably paid her the tribute of respect of taking leave of her before going out. The gentlemen St. Nicholas deemed men of leisure actually had many engagements to keep.

"I must look up my old violin," he explained. "I believe it is a good instrument, and as poor Müller left it to me, with his blessing, I intend to give it a place of honor. I do not imagine the violin is finer than that of the gypsy king, Racz Pali, still I am having it put in order. Who knows?"

The day was cold and the thermometer had verged on zero at sunrise. The freezing of water-pipes had resulted, and although the temperature was now milder, a clouded sky threatening snow, the streets and avenues had a sombre aspect.

William St. Nicholas did not glance at the opposite house as he walked briskly in the direction of the neighboring square. He was still strangely annoyed when he recalled the events of the previous evening, and the dance with Camilla Belt. Why had he looked at her scornfully? How quick she had been to read his thought!

The square was bleak and gray, the withered grass visible, here and there, through the snow, the paths as iron to the foot, while the leafless trees swayed their dry branches in the wind. The fountain in the centre was a solid mass of ice, dull in hue, for the hooded sun robbed the crystal surface of prismatic coloring. The children had deserted the spot, and a few dejected pedestrians cowered on the benches, homeless outcasts, or weary laborers pausing to rest before resuming the burden of toil.

A group pausing near the fountain attracted the quick eye of William St. Nicholas. A youth of nineteen years, with a shock of red hair and a good-natured face, who resembled Mr. Dion Bourcicault in the rôle of the Shaugran, stood there, with three children huddled close at his side. Evidently strangers, they gazed about them, too bewildered to whimper at mere discomfort, and too much frightened to hazard a comment on their novel surroundings.

The youth held a bit of paper in his hand, and, as Mr. St. Nicholas approached, he proffered it for the latter's inspection.

"Mebbe yer honor could tell me where this place is," he hinted, and four pairs of eyes became fixed in desperate interrogation on the new-comer's face.

The gentleman read the name of Mrs. Maggy Donohue, and a number and street on the extreme limits of Harlem. He paused and questioned the shock-headed youth, whose name proved to be Mike Mahoney, and the particulars of whose story were soon elicited. The party had landed from an emigrant ship that morning, and at

Castle Garden it had fallen to the lot of young Mike, chiefly because of his good-nature, as well as for the reason that he came from County Cork also, to find the mother of the young brood under his charge. The grandfather had recently died in the old country, and the surviving relatives deemed it advisable to despatch the children to America, in pursuit of their parents. The fragment of paper, with the address written in pencil, by the parish priest, was the sole clew whereby a dismembered family might become reunited in the wilderness of a foreign land; for the movements of Mr. Patrick Donohue were uncertain, while Mrs. Donohue lived out at service. No time had been wasted in idle correspondence by the practical kinsfolk.

Mr. St. Nicholas directed the waifs to a neighboring avenue, where, by taking a car, their destination might be reached.

"Is it a good bit further, sir?" inquired Mike, more dazed than enlightened by the information received. "Shure, it's dead bate the childer are, intirely."

"Yes; it is a good bit away," admitted Mr. St. Nicholas. He resumed his walk, smoothing his beard with his hand; a habit with him in moments of perplexity. "Poor devil! He will probably take the wrong car and go down town," he soliloquized, and paused.

The group had not quitted the vicinity of the fountain. A harder heart might have been touched by their pathetic aspect.

William St. Nicholas retraced his steps.

"Come," he said, encouragingly. "I will show you the way."

They followed him with the blind confidence of the emigrant, which should serve as his safeguard against harm, even in the haunts of great towns.

The car was passing. He hailed the conveyance, hurried his companions on board, and, with another dubious glance at them, stepped on the platform, selecting such coin as should pay their fare from his own purse. Mike grinned, the children stared, hugging their thin garments more closely about them. Accepting this gracious interposition of Providence, they accommodated themselves in a corner of the vehicle, grateful for the warmth and shelter thus afforded them, and burying their benumbed feet in the fresh straw of the floor.

The track was slippery, the horses weary, the way long in a tedious form of transition, but William St. Nicholas was, at length, deposited with his charge on a wind-swept corner, where blocks of new buildings still flanked vacant lots.

"Now for number Seventy-two," he said, again referring to the paper.

Number Seventy-two was unoccupied, and a bill attached to the

iron railing of the balcony announced that the property would be rented, or sold on highly advantageous terms, by applying to an agent in Wall Street.

Mr. St. Nicholas rang the bell of the house on the right, and demanded information of a smiling negress concerning the late tenants of number Seventy-two, or Mrs. Maggy Donohue. The negress disclaimed all knowledge of either; the house having been closed while she had lived in the locality.

He next essayed the mansion on the left with no better success. A sulky maid, with untidy hair, affirmed she had never heard of Mrs. Donohue, and was sure the cook at number Seventy-two had rejoiced in the name of Bridget Sullivan.

The good Samaritan then crossed the street, and rang at the opposite house, a summons which brought a woman of suspicious temperament, wearing a woollen hood, out of the area door; with a pouncing swiftness she surveyed the group severely, coughed, and wished to know if her interlocutor meant before or after the death of the old gentleman. Mr. St. Nicholas, unacquainted with the old gentleman in question, expressed a wish to find the mother of these children.

The wearer of the hood retorted, snappishly.

"I can't be expected to know all the servants of the neighborhood. I do my own work."

Thus foiled, Mr. St. Nicholas looked about him in some perplexity. What would become of the shivering little mortals cast upon his care? He could not take them home with him to Tulip Place, and he was reluctant to consign them to the station-house for the night. In his own mind he feared Mr. and Mrs. Donohue were myths, long since vanished from the ken of Harlem.

At the date of which we write the elevated railway was not constructed, but none the less the friendly pump of more primitive days had vanished, to be replaced by hydrant and reservoir. The pump would have served as a local club, where, with the replenishment of household pitcher and bucket, some interesting items of the career of Mrs. Donohue could scarcely fail to be gleaned.

Mike removed one hand from his pocket and warmed the purple fingers by blowing on them. The teeth of the boys chattered, while the little girl applied a corner of her faded shawl to her eyes, with a timid and furtive gesture of discouragement.

"Tut! We will find your mammy before you can say Jack Robinson," exclaimed William St. Nicholas, giving the child a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

Failing the pump of earlier times, there still remained the corner grocery. Hither he bent his steps, followed by his companions.

The grocer, a cheerful and florid person, in the act of scooping moist brown sugar from a barrel for a blooming damsel, did not belie his reputation of being *au courant* with the elements of his sphere. The grocer recalled Mrs. Maggy Donohue, although she had been gone from Harlem for the better part of a year. He believed she went to Hoboken or to Staten Island.

"Mrs. Maggy Donohue; present abode Hoboken or Staten Island. Humph! A lively lookout for all concerned," mused Mr. St. Nicholas.

Here the blooming damsel, receiving the parcel of sugar in her basket, came unexpectedly to the rescue. The light in her bright blue eye seemed to warm poor frozen Mike as much as the words that fell from her rosy lips, like the pearls of the fairy tale, and uttered with the richest imaginable brogue. Mrs. Donohue was out at service at number Twenty-seven Elderberry Street, Brooklyn.

"You are sure?" inquired Mr. St. Nicholas, scanning her features keenly.

The blooming damsel bridled slightly, and stated she had been to visit the object of inquiry the previous Sunday after mass. Some further conversation, which acted on Mike with the talismanic charm of freemasonry, resulted in a broad grin of restored confidence.

"We'll find her this time, yer honor," he asserted.

William St. Nicholas again inspected the forlorn rank of youngsters.

"I do believe we are hungry," he said, and sought a bakery, where the little Donohues and their guardian confirmed the suspicion by devouring as many buns and gingernuts as were given them.

William St. Nicholas consulted his watch. It was half-past four o'clock, and the winter twilight would soon gather in. How would these waifs ever find number Twenty-seven Elderberry Street, Brooklyn? No very active play of imagination was requisite to picture them cruising about on the dark waters from one ferry to another, or dropping exhausted by the wayside, the one slender thread of communication with the mother broken, perhaps, forever.

"Come," he said, briefly, and once more stowed them in a passing car.

When the family in Tulip Place met at dinner the son was not of the number. It was not unusual for him to dine out, but he informed his mother when such was his intention.

"I do hope nothing has happened to him," said Mrs. St. Nicholas, in tremulous remembrance of the disappearance of the young master of number Fourteen.

"Nonsense! He is old enough to take care of himself," rejoined

Mr. St. Nicholas, who was in evening dress, and wore a white necktie. "I dare say our Willy here would not care to be too closely attached to his mother's apron-strings, eh?"

"No, sir," said Willy, with marked emphasis. "It is a good plan to carry a pistol, or a sword-cane, though Sam knows a fellow who went to a masquerade ball and took too much champagne at supper. When he came out he walked across town, instead of up the avenue, you know. Found himself next morning in a lumber yard beside the river, with his pockets turned inside out, and even his shirt-studs missing. He might have been murdered if he had made any resistance to the river thieves."

"Now there is a warning for you, Willy," quavered grandmamma.

"It is best not to take too much champagne at supper," supplemented grandpapa, sententiously.

Willy's features acquired an expression of constraint. As a schoolboy, reared amidst the pitfalls of city life, he had enjoyed "his fling," chalking the backs of pedestrians, playing tricks on his preceptors, and defying justice, at times. He had once ridden his pony through the show-window of a jewelry establishment. At another date he had been found, by his uncle, in admiring contemplation of a minstrel troupe, which he intended to join, and had been restored to his unsuspicious mother with some evasive excuses concerning a fire up-town.

As a collegian, a natural aptitude for cards, amateur theatricals, and flirtation led his masculine relatives to exercise an espionage which was too benevolent to arouse his resentment.

"I wish William would come home," said Mrs. Monteith. "It does not look well for him to slight Professor Ashwell after having met him. We might coax him to yield, even at the eleventh hour."

Mrs. Monteith was fresh and brilliant, despite having gone to bed with the dawn. Her train of black velvet was relieved by draperies of white crêpe, brocaded with flowers. The tight velvet sleeve was bordered with a puff of white crêpe, and a soft sash encircled her waist. Ornaments of jet and diamonds sparkled in her ears, and at her throat.

The lady professed scorn for the paltry details of the toilette, and confessed only to a fondness for rare lace. Her judgment in Venetian rose point, the misty Malines, and delicate Valenciennes was unerring, while she avoided a standard of estimating other women by their attire, which is too often the sole American feminine criterion of similar criticism.

A shabby visitor had twice called during the afternoon, demanding to be received by William St. Nicholas. He was a bearded man, evidently a foreigner, and experienced difficulty in expressing his

wishes. He was in a state of great excitement. He had waited half an hour, and finally departed sorrowfully, leaving a package for the absent one.

At the hour when his relatives were thus discussing his movements William St. Nicholas was presiding, as host, at a small table, in a steaming basement restaurant, located near the Fulton Ferry. He watched the children partake of bowls of oyster soup, and was relieved to see the color return to their pinched faces, after the long confinement to the crowded car.

"Now let us try the ferry-boat," he said, when the repast was concluded.

There could be no doubt that, left to themselves, the emigrants would have lingered in the Sybaritic atmosphere of the heated ferry-boat. When the other shore was gained, Mike was nodding drowsily, and the children fast asleep. Mr. St. Nicholas had some difficulty in arousing and forcing them to resume their weary march. They slipped and stumbled on the icy pavement, the little girl lagged behind, weeping unrestrainedly, one of the boys seated himself on the curbstone, announcing his firm determination to go no farther; even Mike grew surly and querulous in his remarks.

"Thank Heaven! The place is near by. I should have to hire a coach-and-six to restore the Donohues to the maternal bosom if the woman lived out by Prospect Park," reflected the commander of this forlorn band of discovery.

Elderberry Street proved a modest locality, situated near the fine quarter of the Heights, yet retaining the characteristics of earlier days. Wooden houses, with porches and balconies, painted white, yellow, and brown, suggested the summer evenings of long ago, when the inhabitants sat on the door-steps, and gossiped with their neighbors. A brick Baptist church occupied one corner, and a Quaker meeting-house stood opposite, thus dividing the religious privileges of the quarter. Willow trees, in their season, spread green tendrils over the meeting-house porch.

Modern luxury intruded in the gabled stable and coach-house, in the rear of a sumptuous mansion on the next street, with an adjacent grass-patch, remnant of former meadows, where a Derby cow took exercise.

Number Twenty-seven twinkled with cheerful light, through half-closed curtains. An agreeable odor, for a frosty night, of roasted meat and gravy became perceptible when a little girl opened the door.

"It's some people for Maggy, ma," she explained, running back to the threshold of a room from whence issued the sound of voices, mingled with a clatter of crockery.

"Call her, then, only don't let her burn the mashed potatoes," was the response.

William St. Nicholas smiled. The comfortable interior pleased him none the less that he was playing the part of a Caliph of Bagdad.

"Oh, Fred! How was Miss Belt dressed?" exclaimed a girl's voice.

"I've told you a dozen times, already," retorted the invisible Fred. "She was a sunflower. There was an heiress from the oil regions dressed like a rose. I danced the German with her."

"How lovely! Was her skirt velvet, or satin, did you say, Fred?" chimed in a second girl.

"I didn't say, because I don't remember. You are enough to drive a man crazy. I saw that tremendous swell, the younger St. Nicholas. He was the Commodore Van Kortlandt."

A buxom woman bustled up the steep flight of stairs from the kitchen, carrying two covered dishes in her hands. She approached the open door.

"Are you Mrs. Maggy Donohue?" inquired William St. Nicholas.

"I am, thin," rejoined the unsuspicious creature, promptly.

"Your children have been sent over from Ireland—"

The sentence remained unfinished. Mrs. Donohue uttered a prolonged shriek, dropped the dishes on the floor, and ejaculated,

"Howly mother, and all the saints!"

Questions, wild laughter, tears, and embraces ensued. William St. Nicholas withdrew. He glanced back from the pavement. The family had emerged from the dining-room, and the mistress of the house demanded an explanation of this extraordinary scene of noise and confusion. Mrs. Donohue's reply was delivered in a high key, and with amazing volubility. She must take the children to Mrs. Murphy's at once. Mike could come, too, and welcome. How could their father look after them when he was shovelling coal at a gas-works, where the hands had struck, and threatened to "blow the head off him" if he emerged.

Seated on board the ferryboat once more, William St. Nicholas communed with his own spirit.

"A wise man has said that the good are not happy, and the happy are not good. I have destroyed the peace and the digestion of an innocent family, and they will have no mashed potatoes for this evening, at least. How small the world is! The son evidently attended Camilla's ball."

He pronounced the name aloud, unconsciously, then relapsed into silence.

The waves beat against the boat, blocks of drifting ice jarred the

machinery; the two cities rose on the opposite shores, with the red glare of opaque vapor in the sky above which makes the atmosphere of night over a town. Two piers rose, vague in the darkness, to be linked together, later, by a cobweb of wire, into a suspension bridge. Some influence, derived from these elements, reached the silent man to whom life appeared, as to Omar Khayam, a terrible enigma, and yet the passing shadow on the wall.

Mrs. Monteith was drawing on her long white gloves, and the carriage was at the door, when the delinquent brother appeared.

"Do follow us to the club, Willy," she urged.

"Thank you. I have been entertaining foreigners, myself, to-day," and this was the sole explanation he ever made.

The package attracted his attention. He unfastened the wrappings, and drew forth the old violin. A strip of paper fluttered out, on which was written, in German,

"The violin is an original. Look at the label. I found it in taking the instrument apart."

William St. Nicholas read the slip, and uttered a subdued whistle.

"Amati. Cremona. 1670. The old musician cannot have suspected its true value. Now I must devote myself seriously to the violin, like the student who practised twelve hours a day, for fifteen years, after he was supposed to have attained perfect proficiency."

The Meerschaum Club was situated on a central thoroughfare. Donald Belt was one of the founders, and the members were esteemed essentially new men. When the daily press was at a loss for other material the amount of capital represented by the Meerschaum Club furnished a topic of respectful and speculative interest. In matters political the bias of this body of brokers, bankers, and railroad magnates was eagerly awaited and discussed. In matters social their hospitality was prized by the ladies, for the Meerschaum Club had not only erected a *bijou* theatre for amateur acting, with reference to the display of magnificent toilets, but received all distinguished foreigners, as well. The ladies invariably flocked to such entertainments, whether to be presented to a noted African explorer, a classical poet, exiled patriot, artist, or actor. There was an element of fascination that never palled in thus invading the haunts of man, and confronting, even probing, the secret recesses, as it were, dedicated to that powerful rival of female charms, tobacco.

On this night the club presented an appearance of decorous elegance. Billiards, cards, cigars, and journals had been banished, for the moment, in favor of flowers, and a fountain spouting perfumed waters.

A welcome to Professor Vincent Ashwell had elicited from that gentleman a promise to address the company gathered to do him

honor. Certain citizens of influence were seated in a semicircle on the tiny stage of the theatre, and when Mr. St. Nicholas arrived, Donald Belt requested him to present the stranger to the audience. Mr. St. Nicholas acquitted himself of the duty in a few neatly turned phrases of introduction.

Professor Ashwell then spoke, amidst the profound silence of curiosity and eager attention, his bearing easy and self-possessed, his thought direct and simple, his voice fuller and richer, in a rapid yet distinct utterance, than his physique might have warranted, his suavity of national compliment a trifle studied.

He thanked his hearers for the kindness with which he was everywhere received, and expressed his surprise at the warmth of the greeting accorded him. The dream of many years was at length fulfilled in visiting America, and he wished to travel thousands of miles before he deemed himself fitted to appreciate so vast and noble a country. He was already familiar with the poems of Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell. He hoped some day to be able to say he had shaken hands with Doctor Holmes. He was prouder of possessing the autograph signature of Emerson than he should be of that of any crowned head. He had been asked if he intended to write a book about America, on his return to the old home, and, although he felt himself in no way qualified for the task, he should be inclined to entitle such a work, "At Last," in imitation of the late Canon Kingsley, when permitted to behold the West India Islands. The scenery, and the architecture of such cities as he had seen, delighted him.

Professor Ashwell appeared as a man of society, and made no allusion to his favorite studies. His *début* was felicitous. Deprived of similar advantages of respectful consideration, in introduction, greater men have spoken and acted before empty houses. From the outset the ladies, led by Mrs. Monteith, were with the affable paleontologist; craving, as they do, the *sauce-piquante* of some fresh emotion. Professor Ashwell was pronounced, by these fair critics, as too sweet for anything, with the most delicious English accent.

Colonel King met Captain Rawdon in the vestibule, and the two exchanged a nonchalant greeting, as men easily aroused to hostility, yet keeping on terms of civility, as liable to meet in any quarter of the globe.

"Good-evening, captain," said the son of Mars, large, corpulent, and a little stiff in gait.

"Good-evening, colonel," responded the son of Neptune, small, dark, and wiry in form.

"Were you at the Belts' ball? I was ordered to Washington," continued the colonel, jauntily.

"No. Worse luck! I had been sent to the Boston Navy Yard to look at a ship," replied the captain, in quick, chirping accents.

They had approached the door of the theatre, and paused to look at the brilliant audience. By common consent their glance sought and found Camilla Belt, her dress of pale corded silk, embroidered with flowers, and tunic of terra-cotta satin contrasting with her stepmother's toilet beyond, which consisted of white silk, wrought with sheaves of golden wheat, and swarms of dragon-flies hovering on jewelled and metallic wings. The Count Della Stella leaned over Mrs. Belt's chair, toying with her fan of white ostrich plumes, interwoven with pearl and shell on the Danicheff model.

The two spectators in the doorway knew the value of a lady's dress, to a nicety, but their mutual interest of the moment centred in the count.

"That man calls himself a soldier," remarked Colonel King, with a mirthless laugh. "He may serve for a military review on a royal birthday, but I should like to see him attacked by Sioux or Apache."

Captain Rawdon smiled mysteriously.

"I have had considerable experience with the Genoese in my day," he retorted, speaking as one whose estimate of the town was condemnatory.

From the expression of Colonel King's eye the wish to consign Count Della Stella to the aborigines might be deemed sincere, while Captain Rawdon's acquaintance with the sons of a once gallant republic seemed to inspire him with no desire to add Camilla's suitor to the number.

"That wicked brother of mine would have found no fossils to ridicule in Professor Ashwell's speech," said Mrs. Monteith to Camilla.

"Your brother?" queried the latter, glancing about her, involuntarily.

Camilla was languid, even abstracted. The count talked French with Aimée, affirming that he had fully understood every word uttered by Professor Ashwell. Willy Monteith, safely intrenched between the plump sisters of Sam Hardinge, by a manœuvre of maternal vigilance, gazed across an impassable gulf of laces and sparkling embroideries, and found Aimée somewhat too vivacious in her responses to the count's remarks.

The company sought the supper-room, where an artistic and facetious member had arranged the *menu* in the form of a catalogue, designed on a leaf of red ivory, with oysters serving as early studies, crustacea for foreshortening, a pheasant for a portrait, and a round of beef as a cattle-piece, exquisite in texture and handling. The chief ornament of the table consisted of a frosted semblance, in spun sugar, of that primeval world to which Professor Ashwell had de-

voted so much study. Strange shapes, roaming amidst rocks and shells of almond paste and chocolate, were distributed among the ladies.

Mrs. Monteith, holding a semi-transparent, batlike pterosaurian between her finger and thumb, as one manages a shrimp, said to Donald Belt, in a tone that admitted of no denial:

"Mr. Belt, we must take Professor Ashwell to see Niagara in winter."

"We might make an excursion on a special train," added Camilla, as she received from Colonel King an antediluvian hippopotamus of the Mediterranean shore, and a crystallized trilobite from Captain Rawdon, while the Count Della Stella hovered near with a fossil coral, flavored with vanilla.

"The ladies must decide the matter," said Donald Belt, with his most gallant bow.

In his own chamber William St. Nicholas drew the bow across the old violin, and even launched into a simple melody. His execution was timid and constrained. The strings of the instrument gave forth no strain of mingled cadences beneath his touch. Still less did inspiration lead him into any wild "Trillo del Diavolo." His eye fell on the sketch he had made, from an historical work in his father's library, of the "bowerie" of Oloffe the Dreamer. This sketch was to have completed the character assumed at the ball. He had not shown it to his hostess, after all. He took the paper and tore it into shreds. What child's play it had all been!

Then he resumed his prelude on the instrument, with sudden dissatisfaction. He was an echo, a paltry imitator! Old Müller, the teacher, must have laughed in his sleeve, in bequeathing to him the gift. Or was it intended to mock and tantalize, goading him to fresh effort, by a keen sense of his own imperfections?

The violin was, also, an emigrant; a wanderer from afar. Fashioned in an Italian workshop centuries before, for those who should come after, on the bank of the river Po, the Amati was first tuned, perhaps, in the shadow of the Terrazo, or the loggia of the cathedral, a piercing note wailing fitfully about Campo-Santo and Baptistery, and thence across the Alps, keeping tone amidst untold vicissitude of change, until it became the faithful comrade of old Müller, and sought fortune only to find bitter poverty in the New World.

The strings gave forth a note, faint, tremulous, and sweet, then a chord snapped.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DANGER.

"There's not a flower on all the hills; the frost is on the pane."—"The May Queen."

"WELL! What do you think of our Niagara?" inquired Donald Belt, with a smile of triumph.

He valued more the awe and surprise reflected in the eyes of strangers than the actual scene as presented to his own observation.

"This is fine; truly majestic!" replied Professor Ashwell, after a pause.

"Bellissima! Beautiful!" echoed the Count Della Stella.

Professor Ashwell forgot his companions in the contemplation of nature, while to the count nature was ever secondary to the companion of the moment.

The hour was early morning, and the January night had performed the function well of binding all objects in filaments of glittering ice. The first rose flush of dawn had yielded to a golden glory, which was shed abroad over the wide expanse of open country, and lingered in the depths of deep blue sky, the glow and delicate reflection of Arctic cold. The river flowed in a rapid current, foaming and flashing about fragments of ice, pausing on the brink, then sweeping down to the frozen silence of the gulf below, where the rude sculptor, Winter, was perpetually fashioning fresh groups of statuary out of the congealed foam of the cataract, all veiled in shifting vapors.

The sun shone on the shrubbery of the banks, where the pendent masses of frozen spray sparkled like brilliants, and the interlacing twigs revealed the minute tracery of midnight frost. The eye, overawed by the tumultuous shock of the green masses of falling water, held prisoner, for a space, by the bridge below, and thence emerging once more in a limpid tide, caught the details of minute decoration on twig and bough.

Morning smiled radiantly on the intruders, winds and storms were laid at rest. Save for the full and measured thunder of the fall there would have been silence; the profound stillness of the country-side, wrapped in winter sleep.

The party stood on the Canada bank, whither they had driven

across the Suspension Bridge to obtain an uninterrupted view from the best point of observation.

Professor Ashwell separated himself, by a few paces, from his companions, and remained silent. His praise had disappointed his host, by its brevity and coldness.

The Englishman, the truest lover of nature among the nations, recalled all previous impressions received from sublime scenes, and added Niagara to the number. His gaze rested on the veil of trembling mist hovering over the masses of frozen shapes at the foot of the great cataract, and he again beheld the approach of day on the Bernese Alps, that barrier rising in ghostly whiteness, like the robes of a transfigured Redeemer, against the beryl green of the horizon, until the first sunbeam, passing from crag and spur to loftiest peak, flushed the marble to crimson and gold. An afternoon on the Rëfelberg, with a storm bursting over the Matterhorn, in which an exploring party was lost; a ramble among the Dolomites, when the grapes hung ripe beneath the withered leaves of every vineyard; holidays in Norway; yachting off the Welsh coast—each recurred to his mind, as he watched the lustrous mass of river curve over the smoothly worn lip of rock, on the opposite bank.

The Count Della Stella was moved to wonder, as a poetical temperament, susceptible to all emotions. His expressions of admiration were sufficiently fervent and varied to satisfy Donald Belt's national pride. The count, keenly alive to beauty in any form, held his own ideal, beside which the untamed Niagara river, the savage fury of boiling torrents, spurning ice-fetters, appeared rude—one of the Titanic forces of earth which he did not comprehend. The terraced slope, adorned with statues, fountains, and parterres of flowers, such as Watteau loved to paint, with gay cavaliers and behooped dames in the foreground, better suited his tastes than this ice-bound scene, the mighty shaft of falling torrents troubling the ear, and intimidating the spectator with a crushing sense of human insignificance.

He remembered garden *fêtes* at Cannes and Nice, when the glow of lamps revealed shadowy masses of palm, aloe, and cassia, interspersed with sprays of roses, beds of ixora, hyacinth, and violets, great white arums, or the pink snow of the Judas tree, and the breath of Niagara made him shudder. Better the fierce African sun, the desert wastes, the rank forests of sluggish rivers, than this pitiless realm of the Frost King. He drew nearer to the side of Camilla, and looked into her eyes.

"You like it?" he hazarded.

"Yes," she replied. "How clear and crisp the air is! All we need are wings."

The sunshine rested on his face—the pure features, youthful, yet sharply accentuated—and laughed in the depths of his eyes. Narcissus may have had the same perennial freshness, when he sought the bank of the stream to contemplate his own reflected image. Such a mirror was ever held before the count in the admiration of women, for to them the early Greek type appeals, even as a charm, inarticulate, evanescent, the merest echo of the sea-shell held to the unaccustomed ear.

Camilla returned his glance with a smile that was tranquil and friendly rather than self-conscious. Daily intercourse with him had become pleasant, and his courtesy was calculated to brighten the hours of feminine idleness, in the best sense of the term. He preferred Mrs. Belt's boudoir to the club, and was never bored when trying new music, toying with wools and needlework, making sketches, displaying tricks of legerdemain, as other men would have been.

His popularity had been rapidly established, and he carefully cultivated a public estimation such as must inevitably enhance his value with Camilla, but he managed to consult the object of his interest by a rapid look, an unobtrusive gesture, in a way gratifying to the feelings of the most capricious and cold maiden. He was a soldier, in addition, and capable of carrying some frayed banner to battle, if necessary.

Poor Mrs. Belt had never tasted the sweets of a deferential respect until she met the Count Della Stella, and the subtle flattery of a demeanor, deemed by him suitable towards a future mother-in-law, had already rendered her an ardent partisan. She had read of such knights, in stolen romances, and she was never weary of contemplating a suitor whose destiny seemed apart from a weary and commonplace world.

When Camilla regarded him more seriously than as the companion of an hour, she put aside the thought to the limit of the month of probation. She did not intend to accept him. She did not love him. She studied him curiously, speculatively, wondering, with a little dread, what his course would be when he learned the worst. Secure in her own conviction of strength she softened to tender reveries over his future. Would he threaten to destroy himself on learning the worst, and receiving her final rejection? She was very kind in her manner towards him, if, at times, preoccupied, while he was frankly confident, happy, and unsuspicious, with a shade more of respect in his intercourse with her than with her friends. Did he realize that her stern resolution was to banish him forever? All these fresh cares of choosing and rejecting the good and evil of life, of discriminating between real and false, were perplexing to

Camilla Belt. She was already involved in a maze of entangling threads, as she realized, pausing there on the brink of Niagara.

She had reached the fulfilment anticipated, longed for, by every girl, and yet she wished, with a sigh of impatience, that the change had not come so swiftly.

Her father turned to her with a look of interest and irritation on his massive features. She approached and slipped her hand through his arm. She was not afraid of his displeasure. The embodiment of her day in this matter of filial reverence, she was prepared to discuss any question with him, on terms of affectionate equality.

"What is it, pa?" inquired the girl who, as a child, had trotted up to her grandfather and grasped his cane.

"Has Professor Ashwell spoken with you?" demanded Donald Belt, stooping to her ear, although the sound of the cataract rendered his words inaudible to the rest of the party.

"No; but Colonel King has made me a third proposal," retorted Camilla, with a roguish glance at the discomfited warrior in question. "Why should Professor Ashwell speak to me?"

Her father regarded her doubtfully. He was too impatient a man for the exercise of diplomatic finesse. He invariably went straight to the point, with a blunt directness which served him good purpose, in his own position, but would have frustrated many of the schemes of old Joseph Belt, in his time.

"Professor Ashwell has been telling me that his chief interest in coming to America was to again see you, my girl," said Donald Belt, watching her narrowly. "He wishes to marry you. I thought I would give you a hint in case he should say anything to you, on this journey."

"Ah!" said Camilla.

She withdrew her arm, and turned to the others once more. Her glance swept the three men who wished to present themselves as suitors, and her first impulse was one of unreasonable repulsion. The next moment she joined hands with Aimée, and ran swiftly towards the building where Indian work was offered for sale.

They were met by Captain Rawdon, and a young man wearing topboots, a fur-lined coat, and a sealskin cap set jauntily on his curls.

"Is there any reason why you ladies should keep Niagara all to yourselves?" inquired the latter, in a fresh and ringing voice.

Willy Monteith had lured Captain Rawdon to accompany him, by another route, and overtaken the party at their destination. The boyish exploit filled his heart with glee. He looked at his mother with a merry twinkle in his blue eyes, as he greeted Camilla and Aimée.

"Did you expect me?" he demanded of the latter, gazing admiringly at the piquant face, framed by the soft gray fur of a coquettish hat. "What sport we might have on this snowcrust, Miss Belt, with sledges and skates. We should shoot the rapids before we knew it, if we once got going!"

"Has anything happened at home, darling?" questioned Mrs. Monteith, advancing,

Willy shook his head saucily, with the petulance of a spoiled child.

"Nothing at all, mamma. How are you, Professor Ashwell? You see I have come to take care of my mother. In America the children look after the parents."

"A filial sentiment," assented Professor Ashwell.

He was meditating on the step he had taken in confiding his sentiments to Donald Belt. The latter had listened in some surprise, apparently, and promised to speak with his daughter. At the same time the American had intimated that he was in no haste to have his only child select a husband. The paleontologist, now a prey to the conflicting emotions of his state, like other men, commenced to regard the brilliant Italian with some anxiety. The count was always near Camilla, and while Professor Ashwell was thoroughly convinced that the other could never be measured by a standard of equality with an Englishman, he deemed it prudent to have his own feelings distinctly understood by the family.

Donald Belt comprehended that, in placing at the disposition of a distinguished savant his guest-chamber, dressing-rooms, and library, he had nourished in his bosom, not a viper, but a prospective son-in-law. The revelation astonished him.

"I suppose your uncle scorns Niagara," said Camilla, selecting Indian beadwork at the stalls with a reckless hand, and giving her parcels to Captain Rawdon to carry for her.

"He's grinding away tremendously at practising on an old violin," retorted Willy, slyly inserting a velvet bag into Aimée's muff. "Let us purchase some moccasins for the slothful bachelor, mamma."

"The slothful bachelor?" repeated Camilla, interrogatively.

"Our family name for my brother, Miss Belt," explained Mrs. Monteith. "There was once a picture in *Punch*, you know, of the slothful bachelor, who was beguiled into calling on a lady he believed to be out, in his dressing-gown and slippers."

"It was all a jolly sell, for the lady was at home," supplemented Willy.

"We use the term as a warning, for my brother is really very popular with the ladies. I sometimes think too much so," said Mrs. Monteith, with a fleeting smile.

Camilla looked at her without comment, yet wondering at her probable meaning. How could William St. Nicholas be too popular?

A week had elapsed since Mrs. Monteith had made the suggestion of showing Professor Ashwell the falls of Niagara in winter, at the Meerschaum Club. The lady had left all details of arrangement to Donald Belt, with such satisfactory result as a palace car, attached to a special train, wending its way out to the city of Buffalo. The hours had sped merrily in this crystal prison, the most perfect phase of modern luxury in travel, with a snowy landscape flitting past the windows, while all was warmth within, of silken curtains, cushioned recesses, and soft rugs.

Count Della Stella had brought his guitar, and sang in a silvery tenor voice those "rispetti" and "stornelli" which, composed at Naples, or by the people of Tuscan mountain slopes, have passed from lip to lip since the fourteenth century, treasured by the grandam, piped by the children tending the sheep and goats, hummed by the peddler, as "Pinafore" and opera-bouffe airs render melodious modern streets in the whistling of urchins and wheezing of barrel-organs.

Professor Ashwell had told ghost stories, thrilling his hearers with descriptions of the hereditary spectre of baronial halls, the light in the turret chamber, beheld in the gloaming of the Scotch loch, the banshee and hare of Irish castles.

Mrs. Southby, the orchid lady, attended by a silent and cadaverous husband and Colonel King, was not the least animated member of the party.

Mrs. Monteith was alone, all efforts to induce her father and brother to accompany her having proved unavailing, while she did not wish to take her son.

"When night falls I like to contemplate sleeping in my own bed," said Mr. St. Nicholas, warming his white hands at the fire of his library.

"I am not interested in the panorama business, my dear Alice," the brother had added.

"Then I must support the family dignity unaided," she had plaintively rejoined. "You are both broken reeds."

Argus-eyed public opinion was sitting in judgment on Mrs. Monteith, at this date, especially the ladies of her acquaintance who had composed the living flowers at Camilla's ball. She had taken up the Belts with her customary impulsiveness, as she would infallibly snub these new people later. Alice St. Nicholas could snub people, teach them their places, in the most polished and effectual manner. In the meanwhile she must have her reasons for her pres-

ent line of conduct, and there was not a motive in the entire range of feminine duplicity with which she was not speedily accredited in animated discussion at luncheon-party and kettledrum. The matrons who had failed to interest William St. Nicholas in their own daughters were not slow to press the thorn of conviction into their bosoms that Mrs. Monteith was endeavoring to make a match between her brother and Camilla. Perhaps the sly mother even had designs on the heiress for Willy the younger. The Orchid and other married ladies, Mrs. Monteith's contemporaries, were of the opinion that she was interested in Professor Ashwell. Public opinion then turned on Camilla, with common consent, finding her features irregular, her shoulders too high, and that she was a perfect fright when over-dressed, having no true perception of artistic blending of colors, with the result, cynical or philosophical, of such defects not signifying with a fortune of ten millions.

Returning to the hotel, the ladies withdrew, to rest before dinner, and Mrs. Monteith claimed the attendance of her son, with a little asperity of tone, which was her sole expression of displeasure at his advent. Willy defied maternal solicitude to the extent of urging Professor Ashwell to explore the ice-bridge and mounds at the base of the cataract.

"So you believe in true love, Mademoiselle Aimée?" said Mrs. Belt, continuing a thread of conversation taken up during the drive back to the hotel.

"Oh, yes, madame!" retorted the little Aimée, eagerly.

"I had the same faith at your age," said the older woman, lapsing unconsciously into a tone of sombre reverie.

Aimée lowered her eyes quickly, fearing she had betrayed some indiscreet curiosity, but she could not resist repeating softly:

"The erring painter made Love blind,
Highest Love, who shines on all;
Him, radiant, sharpest-sighted god
None can bewilder;
Whose eyes pierce
The universe.
Path-finder, road-builder,
Mediator, royal giver,
Rightly seeing, rightly seen,
Of joyful and transparent mien."

"A pretty sentiment," commented Mrs. Belt. "Are people ever like that, in our day?" She paused abruptly, and regarded her two companions with a scared expression.

The eyes and cheeks of Aimée glowed.

"I am sure of it, dear madame," she answered, bravely. "I would rather die than disbelieve it. You know the history of

Mademoiselle Lullin? No? How strange! She was young, beautiful, rich, and affianced to the botanist Huber, when he was stricken with blindness. Other suitors endeavored to win her, but she kept her word and married him. *Tiens!* She was sight and life, a perpetual joy to her husband. Huber said: 'Je serais presque désolé de ne pas être aveugle, car je ne connaîtrais pas a quel point ou peut-être aimé.' Ah, madame, that was love!"

The sudden eloquence of Aimée astonished even herself. The words seemed to escape from her heart, by her lips, unawares.

Mrs. Belt's abstraction became more profound.

"To live and die for a man," she murmured. "Few women resemble Mademoiselle Lullin."

"Perhaps there are many," interpolated Camilla.

"No! No! There are few, very few," cried the stepmother, as if the protest were wrung from her against her will.

Camilla approached Aimée, and took her by the chin.

"What is all this, mademoiselle?" she demanded, with assumed gravity. "Are we to inform the Aunt Marthe at Geneva that some gay cavalier has been sighing:

> "'She will not give me heaven. 'Tis well.
> Lose who may—I still can say,
> Those who win heaven, blest are they.'"

"You will not have to think such things of me, dear Miss Belt," retorted Aimée quickly. "I defend the sentiment, that is all."

"Did you leave your heart behind you among the glacier peaks, *chérie?*" teased Camilla.

"I came from the *pension* to you, Miss Belt. I have never had an *affaire de cœur,*" said Aimée, laughing to conceal petulance.

Twilight deepened to the winter night. A keen wind came wailing up the gorge, swaying the Suspension Bridge on the cobweb tracery of cables. On the opposite, Canada, shore a house was burning, and the flames, bursting through the roof, cast a ruddy glow on the faces of the crowd gathered to assist, and to witness the disaster.

Camilla Belt stood on the brink, charmed and troubled by the grandeur of the spectacle. By what miracle of change were the past and the present swept away, leaving only the tremulous gleam of a future?

From time to time the wind bore confused cries across the stream, from the scene of conflagration, but the panic, distress, and despair seemed remote, separated by that frozen barrier, and reached the passive observer in distorted and fantastic shape, like the images of dreams.

"If they are poor people I should like to build them another

house," thought Camilla, drawing her furred mantle more closely about her.

The voice of the darkness rather than of the light, the fall filled all nature with the mighty volume of a perpetual anthem. Now it acquired the tone of giants rending the subterranean forces of the earth in anger, or no less terrible mirth. Again, a chorus of winds seemed to interweave their strain with the lament of the hurrying river, swirling in dark pools, foam-flecked, mingling in a louder murmur about bowlders, and dying away amidst hollow echoes, as if finally lost in invisible caves. The mists of spray trembled on the breath of night, blanching to ethereal vapor, suspended in the air, in contrast with the gloom of cliffs worn by the wasting torrents of years, then settled again in heavier folds over the frothy waves. The snow spread a mantle on the surrounding country, vast, undulating, lost in the gray obscurity of horizon, here clinging in soft masses to bough and trunk of tree, and there swept into hillocks by the storm.

The stars, sparkling in the sky, found transient reflections, faint and evanescent, in the crystal masses of pendent icicle, bridge, and spray-drenched shrubbery.

Willy Monteith drew Mademoiselle Aimée away to peer over giddy brinks. Oh, the terrible fascination of gazing far down into the abyss, with a companion close at one's side, to echo the wonder inspired!

"Mr. Belt, may I beg you to reclaim my son for me?" exclaimed Mrs. Monteith, in a tone of annoyance mingled with genuine alarm. "He is utterly reckless, and he has not the head of a Swiss mountaineer."

"Mamzelle, you are wanted!" said Donald Belt; and his clear, metallic voice, with the ring of authority in its tones, reached the girl's ear even amidst the roar of the cascade.

She returned to Mrs. Belt's side as demurely as a kitten, but with the breathless exhilaration and sparkling eyes peculiar to the young of all created animals, after indulging in a scamper.

Willy rejoined his mother, with the same decorous compliance to authority, and the two stole glances at each other across their elders.

In coming forth to view the scene, after dinner, Professor Ashwell had placed himself beside Camilla, while the Count Della Stella no less obstinately assumed his post on her left.

"You are not fond of climbing, count," said the professor. "You did not join us this afternoon."

"On ice? No," replied the count, shrugging his shoulders.

"Confess that you are not a member of the Alpine Club," said the professor, laughing in a dry manner.

"I have done some military work in the Alps," was the imperturbable response, as the count twisted his mustache.

If Professor Ashwell, annoyed himself, intended to irritate his adversary as well, by administering those pin-pricks always possible in the most affable general conversation, the count ignored any such intention.

The latter made a careless movement forward on the smooth crust of snow, already hardening with the frost of another night, and his foot slipped on the perilous brink.

Camilla, with the rapidity of instinct rather than any distinct realization of danger, stretched forth her hands, caught his arm, and drew him back to her side. The swerving to right or left of an inch, a moment more, with impetus gained on the slope, and the count would have disappeared forever in the gulf below. Nay, additional weight forward, and he would have dragged Camilla with him.

The peril over, each read the danger in the other's eyes.

"Mind your footing," warned Professor Ashwell.

His voice sounded dry, hollow, far away, to their ears, mingling with the surging of the waters and the moaning of the wind. The rest of the party had not realized the incident, in the obscurity.

"Are you safe?" gasped Camilla, awakening to the shock of a great surprise without fully comprehending the change.

This man had hung over the precipice edge, threatened with a fearful death, and she had saved him.

The count took her hand, kissed it reverentially and placed it within his arm.

"Camilla *mia*, love me, or I shall wish you had allowed me to perish there," he pleaded, in a tone of passionate entreaty.

Camilla was dumb, spellbound. The night, with its myriad voices, the stars glittering far above, the sombre river, striving to free the turbid waters of baffling ice, answered for her:

"To save is to pity or to love."

CHAPTER IX.

A TWELFTH-NIGHT CAKE.

"*Love the gift is Love the debt.*"—"The Miller's Daughter."

THE slip on the ice, so nearly fatal to the Count Della Stella, was productive of immediate consequences. The party had returned to New York by the Hudson River, a trifle spent and weary of such intimate intercourse, in the mood apt to prevail at the close of an excursion, or during the last days of a protracted voyage.

"Sure I am
The touchstone of companionship will test
Heart's gold, and purge base pinchbeck."

Professor Ashwell, Colonel King, and Captain Rawdon experienced an uncomfortable conviction that they had, respectively, come in for a large share of the pinchbeck.

To Camilla the way was not long. The motion of the train permitted her to think, undisturbed, while her gaze followed the windings of the river, frozen the entire length from mountain to sea. Groups of men drew great blocks of pure ice from the current, at certain points, and occasionally a sledge-boat skimmed before the wind with sail set.

In her meditations she compared the stream to her own life in the phase of girlhood, that was rapidly vanishing, left far behind. She asked herself, with a thrill of dreamy wonder, if she were about to seek unknown shores. The strength of purpose, on which she had prided herself, had failed her in the very moment of trial. The physical energy that had served good purpose in grasping the arm of her companion had left her, in reaction, morally weak. She had given her word to this beautiful, tender, and impassioned lover, under the stars, on the brink of Niagara. In her dreams she saw him poised over the awful abyss of swirling mist and rock, held back by her hand alone, and her whole nature began to warm towards him. The interest awakened in her breast was not unmingled with some faint curiosity. She was perplexed rather than happy. He belonged to her, body and soul. Why should she not belong to him?

The count, having discussed military tactics with Colonel King, and railway systems with several members of the Meerschaum Club, had

taken a seat in the palace car beside Mrs. Belt, who made a place for him, smilingly. The gentlemen of the Meerschaum Club were disposed to think well of him, whatever the opinion secretly cherished by Colonel King might have been, for he possessed, in a rare degree, those qualities of character for which a Frenchman would have designated him as "*spirituel*," and an Anglo-Saxon "a good fellow."

He, also, contemplated the ice-bound river, and discreetly held aloof from Camilla. He scarcely saw the Hudson, for the exultation filling his soul rendered him almost oblivious of his companions. The winter day, with a sky presaging one of the great snowstorms of the year, could not chill the glow of triumph in his heart. He was victorious. He had won the cause in a week, instead of lingering in suspense for a month. Camilla had given her word. The father would not favor his suit, but he did not fear the opposition of authoritative Donald Belt. There must be some chord to touch skilfully in his organization, some thread to pull, if one took the trouble to study the matter. At present such study was superfluous. The ladies were on his side. Camilla should be made to love him as he loved her.

Since his most tender years of military cadetship the count had enshrined some female image in his thought, and carried a photograph in his pocket for frequent and rapturous contemplation. Easily transferred, this vigorous vine of sentiment had twined afresh about Camilla with an unquestionable sincerity of ardor, if not without alloy of delight in all the benefits she would be able to bestow upon him.

In his school of life he was neither mercenary nor vicious. Indeed, his temperate avoidance of all excesses might put to shame many a reveller of colder climates, while his simplicity of personal habits would be deemed naïve by Paris, London, and New York. A perfectly natural phase of devotion to Camilla was to behold himself, in agreeable contemplation, in the future state of matrimony, and not the bride, heiress, wife. He would shine before his world, thanks to a good marriage, and without suitable settlements he could not marry at all.

An occasional word uttered by Mrs. Belt did not check his castle-building, and yet, in the midst of rose-tinted reveries, conjured up by success, the count was aware of some disturbing current of influence. He turned his head slowly, and perceived the eyes of Mrs. Monteith and her son fixed upon him.

Willy was teaching Mademoiselle Aimée a game of cards at the little table in the centre of the car, and Mrs. Monteith found occasion to watch their progress.

The glance, purely involuntary on their part, had been sensitively felt by the count.

"That woman would bring me misfortune if she could," thought the object of scrutiny, with a chill sentiment of superstition, and he made a rapid gesture of averting the Evil Eye.

He had studied the career of his countryman, Christopher Columbus, in visiting America, entirely with reference to the compliments easily conveyed to the people. Now he began to cherish a certain feeling of fatalism in comparison between them. The dream was fair, of finding the forests fragrant with spices, the mountains shining with priceless gems; the magical transmutation of all metals into gold was easy, to lead a crusade in rebuilding the Holy Sepulchre possible; but the unshipping of the rudder, the somnolency of the helmsman, the error of a marine observation, might wreck the enterprise. What mischief could the dislike of the lady with the aquiline nose bring to him, Azzolino Della Stella? He dismissed the misgiving with a smile of amusement lurking beneath the veil of silky mustache. Perhaps there passed before his vision at the moment one of the maxims of his race: "The world belongs to him who will take it."

The false step on the snow-crusted bank of Niagara had been very genuine, and wholly unpremeditated, and he still shrank from contemplating the risk he had run. The count did not court death. He did not belong to the class of men who dare the breath of the avalanche to annihilate, or scale peaks from preference. His natural quickness of mind had led him to strengthen the situation, by artificial means, afterwards. He had thrown himself on the mercy of Camilla when she was trembling for his safety, and she had yielded. He glanced at her, seated opposite in the car, grateful to her for the rescue he preferred to owe to her than to another woman, and still better satisfied with the key to her own character thus placed in his grasp.

"You must draw three times from the pack, mademoiselle," announced Willy Monteith, shuffling the cards diligently. "If I wrote you a little note would you reply, to the care of Samuel Hardinge, Bachelors' Club? Yes, draw three times, so!"

Aimée shook her head, and gazed attentively at the cards instead of at her interlocutor; but a kindred glow touched both of the young faces, and a dimple appeared in the girl's olive cheek. Oh, why was Mrs. Monteith so haughty and suspicious in her bearing when her son was so kind?

The party reached New York, and separated. The news flew abroad on every wind that Camilla Belt was surely engaged to the Count Della Stella. Stormy debates must ensue with her father, who was sure

to be prejudiced against such a match, but Camilla would have her own way, and if she had decided to marry the count no obstacle in the world would prevent her. A girl with such a chin usually knows her own mind, at least. Thus reasoned the gossips, stimulated by fresh items of interest concerning the excursion to Niagara from the lips of the Orchid lady, and endless conjectures as to the trousseau and wedding ensued. Of course Camilla would go to Europe immediately, and probably live at Rome. Would she cut all her American friends ever afterwards? Visions of the carnival, and the recuperation of failing health to be derived from journeys abroad, as well as the linguistic and musical improvement of the children, began to take form in feminine brains, together with much leaning on the advice of the family physician, whose skill, or the reverse, would depend on the fiat issued by the lips of Æsculapius on fitting occasion.

Discussions there were in the Belt mansion, where the master found himself foiled at every turn. The count had presented his claim with dignity and address, and Donald Belt had received him brusquely, scanning the suitor with open hostility from keen eyes beneath knitted, shaggy brows.

"He wishes to still manage his daughter's fortune," the count had reasoned, mentally, scrutinizing his own slender gaiter. Aloud, he added:

"I love your daughter, and I venture to believe she loves me."

Camilla had been equally unsatisfactory in her demeanor. She had calmly, even smilingly, confronted her parent, resting her hands on his shoulders, and demanded his objections to Count Della Stella. Did her father know anything derogatory to him as a gentleman? He was a foreigner. Every man could not be born an American. She knew, and believed in him. She was going to be very, very fond of him.

Donald Belt lost patience at this juncture, and burst forth with:

"What can a girl know of a man? I had expected more of you."

"What more can you ask than that I love my husband and he loves me?" inquired the daughter, steadily.

Her composure was unusual, her eyes dreamy, musing, rather than lighted by the tremors of doubt and the delight of a first love. Her stepmother, watching her, reflected that it was not in this fashion she should have accepted the count in her own maidenhood. In this domestic dissension the timid and reticent woman, who shrank from contention with her dictatorial lord, unexpectedly turned upon him.

"Perhaps you would prefer Professor Ashwell for a son-in-law,"

she suggested, in an accent of scorn, while her delicate nostrils dilated as if to give emphasis to her words.

He looked at her in silence for a moment, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his coat, and then said, abruptly,

"I suppose Professor Ashwell is an honest man."

"Why should not the count be an honest man also?" urged Mrs. Belt, with irrational, feminine partisanship seasoned by a grain of the salt of true logic. "It seems to me the professor is as open to the charge of fortune-hunting as the count. Besides, the standard is different. The count cannot marry without money, while the professor can very well marry any poor girl in his own country, if he chooses."

"Thank you, mamma," said Camilla, kissing the cheek of this unexpected partisan. "You will be the most beautiful American at Rome, when you come over. We shall hear the old term perpetually repeated of *La belle Americaine.* I intend having a bust made of you, mamma, by a famous sculptor the count has told me about."

"If you must marry out of your own country, I should prefer an Englishman," demurred Donald Belt, frowning at the two women, whose attitude was that of conspirators.

"Nobody wishes me for a wife in my own country," laughed Camilla. "Besides, you have not found me that British duke, sir."

"I don't see the hurry," retorted Donald Belt, declining to smile at these pleasantries. "Put off your wedding until next year."

"No; I have promised to return with him;" Camilla spoke slowly, yet with resolution.

Donald Belt was aghast. He grew a trifle pale about the lips; a symptom of powerful emotion with him. He repented of the folly of allowing the count to daily frequent his house, now that he saw clearly the silken meshes of the net of intimacy woven about the family by such intercourse. For a moment he was shaken by the fierce anger which longs to assert parental authority and imprison a rebellious daughter in seclusion until she repents of folly and bends to the dictates of maturer wisdom. Then he remembered Camilla was of age, and had always asserted a will of her own.

"You seem to have promised this—this foreigner a great many things!" he exclaimed, with pardonable bitterness. "I don't know what you can find to admire in him except a big mustache. Of course my advice goes for nothing."

Camilla put her arm about his neck.

"Your advice is worth much, father dear," she replied, with the steady yet abstracted expression that was new to her. "You would not like me to become a dry and stiff old maid, instead of the Countess Della Stella; now, would you?"

"There need be no question of your becoming a dry and stiff old maid," he said, angrily. "One would think you were bewitched, and that the count had thrown some spell over you."

"The spell of love," murmured Mrs. Belt, softly.

Her husband glanced at her with inexpressible contempt.

"You are a fool!" he ejaculated. "Come, come, Camilla, wake up! rouse yourself, and put the marriage off for a while."

Camilla gave him a look of sudden doubt and distrust. Was he in the right, and she in the wrong? How could she decide? How could a girl ever know?

"It is too late. I have given my word," she said, after a moment of reflection.

"A girl's word does not count for much," hinted the father, with prompt sophistry.

Camilla shook her head. Perhaps she rejoiced that indecision was no longer possible.

Then Donald Belt set himself to arranging his daughter's affairs, with the aid of the best legal advice, and the distinct aim of curtailing future extravagance in a prospective son-in-law by every possible means.

He gave his hand to the count sullenly at their next meeting, but he was understood to have yielded to the wishes of Camilla, since it was not in his power to alter her resolution. Old Joseph Belt had left the management of Camilla's fortune to his son only during her minority, and now there could be no doubt of her right to select a husband, especially if no graver fault need be found with the suitor than his foreign birth, good looks, and grace of bearing.

Apart from the surface effusions of public life, which tended to establish his popularity, Donald Belt was stern and reticent to a degree that rendered him open to the imputation of hardness. No one was aware of the full extent of his disappointment in the choice of his only child. He had expected better things of Camilla than that she should permit herself to be taken captive by the first comer. The proposal of Professor Ashwell had not moved him to enthusiasm, yet the paleontologist was better than the Count Della Stella. Foreign titles inspired distrust in Donald Belt, aware that he was too ignorant to detect the genuine from the false. He had neither leisure nor inclination to study the matter; the present sufficed for him, and the city of New York, with an occasional voyage to Europe, was a sphere absorbing all his energies. His nights were robbed of sleep, and his spirit was heavy, because, in his estimation, his daughter had gone so cheaply. In the family circle his manner suffered an increased surliness. Irascible in temper, he had ever been an in-

dulgent father, and was an unsympathetic rather than a tyrannical husband.

On Twelfth Night the Belt house was again open to receive visitors. Professor Ashwell was on the eve of departure for Boston. No avowal of attachment had been made by the learned man, who readily perceived that such overtures would be superfluous. Such chagrin as he may have experienced was kept safely locked in his own breast.

Camilla's bearing towards the professor was marked by a gayety verging on mockery. She was attentive to his preferences, as a hostess alone can be, and she even crossed lances with him in those discussions of national differences in which Mrs. Monteith delighted. The latter had more *esprit* and delicacy, it is true, for Camilla's warfare partook of the independence that is akin to bluntness.

A frivolous and giddy girl, the professor decided her to be, and perhaps unworthy of his steel. He began to perceive that differences existed in the States, as elsewhere. Mrs. Monteith was evidently better born and better bred than Camilla Belt.

There had been a dinner-party that evening, after which all the world was invited to cut a Twelfth-cake with Professor Ashwell, previous to his departure.

At eight o'clock Mrs. Monteith, object of flattering comparison in the mind of the savant, entered the library, enveloped in a dressing-gown, with her hair dishevelled, and a vinaigrette in her hand.

"I am not going to the Belts," she announced, yawning. "My head aches, and I am tired."

Willy, the younger, made a backward turn on the carpet, with his left foot.

"We are sure to have a dance in that prime ballroom," he said, with the inconsequence of youth.

"We? Who?" questioned his mother, sharply, and raising her head to look at him.

"Oh, everybody," he retorted, carelessly. "There's to be some sort of a surprise for Twelfth Night. Miss Belt and Mademoiselle Aimée have arranged it all."

"Indeed! Will you serve again as Phaeton?" pursued Mrs. Monteith, with tart displeasure.

"I've not been invited," laughed Willy. "How glum you look, mamma! You used to be fond of a bit of fun yourself."

Mrs. Monteith reverted to a contemplation of the fire, without response.

"Alice must break down, some time," remarked Mrs. St. Nicholas, unfolding a fresh newspaper beside the shaded lamp on the table. "Her nerves seem to be made of steel. People live too fast nowadays."

"I think it would be civil for me to go," said William St. Nicholas, who was searching the columns of another journal near the lamp.

His sister shot a glance of annoyance in his direction.

"What is the use of your going, my dear William?" she demanded.

"You see, it would be civil," he repeated, speaking a little hurriedly for him, and with his face concealed by the newspaper.

"I will look in, myself," said Mr. St. Nicholas, briskly.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Monteith stood at the street door, surrounded by billows of lavender silk, and buttoning a glove, with an expression of martyrdom on her face.

"If you are all going I must take my share of the burden," she said, plaintively.

"You are a good girl," replied her brother, smiling beneath his beard at heroism which was transparent to him. "I suppose it is more *convenable* for us to go."

"Yes. We must set a good example," she answered, smiling in turn.

The ladies of the opposite house awaited their guests, each in her own way. Mrs. Belt, attired in ruby velvet, with panels of satin flowers outlined with gold, and sleeves which permitted glimpses of snowy shoulder and arm through the embroidery, had seated herself in an antique chair with a high back carved in black and gilt. Here, with her white hair gathered in soft puffs, her fan moving idly, and her heeled slipper tapping the carpet, she resembled a portrait of a lady of the eighteenth century.

Little Mademoiselle Aimée, in a dress of pearl-gray silk, with garnet ornaments, flitted from room to room, admiring her own toilet in the mirrors as she passed, or pausing to adjust a jewelled pin anew in the coils of her dark tresses.

Camilla paced the picture-gallery, absorbed in thought. Her robe of jasper-green Genoese velvet, with Japanese brocade, shimmered in a glittering train on the tessellated floor.

William St. Nicholas approached her, while his father and sister paused to greet Mrs. Belt. Camilla watched him advance towards her with an odd sensation of pleasure and triumph, not unmingled with pain. The emotion was inexplicable to her, and quickly suppressed, only it seemed to her that she was bidding farewell to her childhood and youth, as the dying take leave of familiar objects.

Possibly the same thought occurred to him, for he smiled, and extended his hand, in which Camilla frankly placed her own. What was the superiority of William St. Nicholas to her now?

"Fate has really dealt unfairly with us, Miss Belt, for, although

we have the same birthday, we have never become acquainted," he said.

"A lost opportunity, Mr. St. Nicholas. I am going to live across the seas," replied Camilla.

Music floated through the door, the fairy harmonies—thrilling, trembling, and mingling in exquisite accord—of mandolins. Count Della Stella had discovered a company of *mandolinisti*, and thus presented them to a new audience.

"Will you be happy?"

William St. Nicholas did not utter the words aloud, and yet they reached Camilla's ear and soul as the emanation of his thought. To be happy! To make the happiness of another life! The rippling melody of the mandolins merged into a minor key, fitful, pensive, like the fleeting shadow of a half-uttered regret. Camilla's heart leaped in her breast, and then seemed to pause in its feverish pulsations. A sudden tremor of misgiving shook her and forced her to contemplate her own weakness, all the while the music breathed forth airy measure, and the neighbor from over the way stood before her in the picture-gallery, uttering the usual platitudes of society.

These two looked at each other, moved by a grave, mutual inquiry: on the part of the man, amused, speculative, quizzical; on the part of the woman, softer, more serious, even magnetic, because robbed of personal self-consciousness. They might have met daily for years, under ordinary circumstances, without the transmission of that light from eye to eye. The change which had come to Camilla smote the spark of vital fire from the metal of cold indifference.

"And you?"

The gaze of Camilla penetrated, weighed, scathed in a merciless scrutiny; the egotism of William St. Nicholas shrivelled before a judgment impossible to withstand.

Then a mellow voice said:

"Camilla *mia*, I have brought the wedding-fan. It is my mother's gift. To-night you belong all to Genoa."

The Count Della Stella stood before them, brilliant, radiant, and joyous. Neither Camilla nor William St. Nicholas had heard his step. He had assumed his uniform of black and gold to gratify Mrs. Belt, and the soldier's garb suited him marvellously well. He bowed to the visitor, extended his hand, and said, "How do."

Mr. St. Nicholas returned the greeting, and withdrew to seek Mrs. Belt.

Camilla accepted the gift with a smile, and a flush on her cheek, while the count's glance enveloped her with a caressing appreciation of her Genoa velvet train.

The fan, work of a Roman artist, represented a wedding of a

Della Stella with one of a noble family of Mantua, equally illustrious. The bride advanced in a grand *sala* paved with marble and hung with tapestry, accompanied by four cavaliers of honor, and extended her hand to the groom, attired in the costume of the fourteenth century. Groups of noble ladies assisted at the nuptials, with pages in attendance, while Cupids held aloft the circlet of ring between the scutcheons of the two houses.

Willy Monteith's expectations were verified, and Twelfth Night celebrated with becoming merriment. At one moment a fortune-teller went about, whose disguise was impenetrable, and read the palms of the company, finding especial reason for studying those of Camilla and the count. At another time Camilla presided over a lottery, the numbers of which had been previously distributed among the company, and each proved a prize. Another diversion occasioned Mrs. Monteith anxiety, for it necessitated the withdrawal of her son, with other young people, to a distant room, until the doors were opened, revealing a Swiss châlet, decked with the traditional agates, wood-carving, crystals, and onyx beads, and where a music-box played "William Tell." Mademoiselle Aimée stood behind the counter, as saleswoman, in the peasant costume of the Canton Berne.

Who so adroit and ingratiating as the little Aimée, disposing of crystal bonbon-boxes for the ladies, and cigar-cases for the gentlemen, all marked with Camilla's monogram.

Mrs. Monteith tapped her brother on the arm.

"I wish you would oblige me by devoting yourself to that Swiss maiden," she whispered.

"She is a pretty little creature," he assented, indolently.

"She is as artful as the rest of her class," said Mrs. Monteith, sharply.

When supper was served, Professor Ashwell was led before a gigantic Twelfth-cake, surrounded by the rose, thistle, and shamrock, in sugar wreathings, and crowned by the figure of Britannia, and requested to cut it with a silver knife.

A bowl of punch smoked near, a traditional tribute to his supposed preference in a beverage, as unalterable as the Continental faith in raw beef as his chief aliment.

Old Mr. St. Nicholas gave a toast over the punch, and pledged the guest in the first glass. He was altogether gracious in his demeanor to Donald Belt, and paid Mrs. Belt flowery compliments, with a flavor of old-fashioned elegance about them. He admired the Count Della Stella, according him the willing tribute of age, once young and handsome.

Returning home across the street, after midnight, he was the

most cheerful and loquacious member of his family. He permitted himself the indulgence of a fine curiosity as to settlements, and what the future course of Donald Belt would be when his daughter was married and living in a foreign country.

"What an abominable thing it is to throw away that girl on a beggarly Italian officer!" exclaimed William St. Nicholas, with sudden vehemence.

"Bless me!" ejaculated his father.

"Yes; a beggarly foreigner," echoed Willy, the younger, in a grumbling tone.

The count had again cast in shadow the otherwise brilliant social qualities of Sam Hardinge and Willy, and the grievance rankled in the bosoms of these popular young gentlemen.

They had entered the library, where the fire invited them to linger, for they were an unusually sympathetic household in the matter of outspoken thought, and the discussion of the affairs of their world. The ruddy glow of firelight warmed the dark maroon hangings, and gleamed on the ponderous portraits the descendant liked to ascribe to Sir Peter Lely. A jasmine pipe, with amber mouthpiece, once belonging to a stadtholder of Holland, was suspended above the chimneypiece. A chair of oak, with arms terminating in eagles' claws, held the place of honor in a corner. An Egyptian bronze of the god Ptah, with hair and beard inlaid with *niello* work, and the sacred collar decorated with gold and enamel, stood on a pedestal in the window. Cabinets and glass-cases, containing Greek and Roman coins, agates, and amulets, were scattered about, inviting leisurely inspection. The books, a trifle worn from friendly use, presented a marked contrast to the sumptuous and unsullied elegance of the volumes ranged on the shelves of Donald Belt's library.

Mrs. Monteith regarded her brother and her son with a satirical expression. Her own face was sallow and fatigued. She once more had recourse to her vinaigrette.

"Poor Baron Kalb complained of the jealousy of Americans to foreigners in his day," she said, loftily. "The count has eclipsed everybody. I saw that all was over at Niagara. In papa's time he could not have gained the goal so easily, but now there is no one to prevent him."

William St. Nicholas smiled.

"My dear Alice, you are complimentary to your contemporaries," he said.

"If my contemporaries took the trouble to hold their own ground I should not be contemptuous," she replied. Then she added, with a little outburst of feminine spite, "You are both jealous of the Count Della Stella."

"Jealous! What of, mamma?" cried Willy, indignantly.

"I jealous?" said William St. Nicholas, aghast at the imputation. "I care nothing for the count or for Camilla." He paused abruptly and bit his lip.

"The idea!" blustered Willy, the younger.

"Mamma has the headache, my lad," explained the uncle, in a tone of forbearance. "Good-night."

"Good-night," added Willy, the younger, with his nose in the air, and followed his uncle.

The petted child felt that his mother deserved no kiss on the occasion.

Mrs. Monteith smiled a wan and peevish smile at the fire. Irritated herself, she had succeeded in disturbing two other people. The visitor to menagerie or zoological garden may observe the same mood in the animal kingdom, whether lady tiger blinking in the sun and snarling at the well-meant greeting of a neighbor, or surly hippopotamus intent on arousing brother hippopotami from a nap on the border of a muddy pond, or golden pheasant pecking at a mild and dowdy little brown mate.

Mr. St. Nicholas stood before the fire in a thoughtful attitude.

"Alice, do you mean to infer that our William had any sort of liking for—"

"There is no use in inferring anything now, sir," she interposed, rising from her chair and kissing her father.

"Humph! The fortune is ten millions," soliloquized Mr. St. Nicholas.

A few minutes later Willy Monteith thrust his curly head into the door of his mother's dressing-room, actuated by filial affection and intense curiosity.

"Mamma, Camilla Belt is an awfully nice girl," he asserted, advancing on tiptoe.

"Ah?" queried Mrs. Monteith, still unrelenting in attitude, and rejoicing in an excuse for coldness.

"You noticed how he flew out when the count was mentioned?" pursued the son, fun brimming over in his saucy blue eyes at the recollection. "Do you think Uncle Willy would have married her if the foreigner had not interfered? Say, mamma?"

"Hush!" Mrs. Monteith placed her hand on his lips, but she bade him good-night more tenderly than she had intended doing.

"All the same, such things should not be allowed," said the young patriot, drawing himself up to his full height, and knitting his brows in a stern and menacing fashion.

His mother drew her finger, playfully, across his upper lip.

"When you can boast such a superb mustache as the

count's you may hope to hold your own," she said. "Now go to bed."

Once alone, William St. Nicholas yielded to a fit of ill-temper. He flung the old violin across the room, and it fell, neglected, in a corner. Then he tore up the score of the operetta of the birthday, already well advanced in composition, after which he dropped the little book of pink plush sent to him by Camilla, on the eighteenth of December, into the fire, and watched it consume among the coals with a savage satisfaction. He was dissatisfied with everything. He despised the paltry ambitions and aspirations of all the world, his own included.

A girl whom he did not know, and whose acquaintance had never seemed especially desirable, had just held before his startled eyes a mirror reflecting himself. In the fulness of her contentment she had demanded of him what his own lot contained, and what his future promised. Happiness, when analyzed, vanishes. He held nothing. He sat beside the hearth and gazed at the crumbling ashes of the birthday gift as blankly as the spirit in limbo, whose plaint found an echo in his breast:

> "In dreams I walked by Lethe on this side;
> There where souls taste not yet the sleepy flood,
> Nor in oblivion drink beatitude;
> But roam and dote on memory, as they died.
> Each man, alone unto himself, wide-eyed,
> Inwardly gazing in abstracted mood,
> Went by the waves; and all that multitude
> Seemed in my dreaming thought unsatisfied.
> Some too there were whose longing, like a crown
> Of leaden anguish, weighed on weary brows,
> Who murmured in delirium: Down, down, down!
> We lived not, for we loved not! Dreams are we!
> Death shuns us, who shunned life! What hell shall rouse
> Blank souls from blurred insensibility?"

Tulip Place awaited the dawn, in gray shadow.

Tulip Place held in the darkness elements of strife, resistance, and passive acquiescence to the existing order of things, for, truly, in every life, however uneventful, there is a St. Helena as well as a field of Waterloo.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNT'S MUSTACHE.

"*The darling of the court,*
Loved of the loveliest."—"Lancelot and Elaine."

ONE month later the event occurred which was never to be forgotten as long as the Belt mansion stood, and Tulip Place could be designated as a street. Lapse of time might embellish the recital, as the wagging of many tongues is apt to do, but the incident, whether accepted as comedy or tragedy, lost nothing as it receded with the years, just as an object when beheld through a telescope becomes more distinct in detachment from immediate surroundings.

Count Della Stella had awakened on his wedding-day with such pleasurable and triumphant reflections as a man of emotional temperament would be likely to indulge in under the circumstances. He had gained the love he sought, and was happy. It is to be feared that his interest in American institutions, other than the judicious investment of property, was exceedingly moderate, while the page of history he had set himself to learn was the Belt household, with special reference to Camilla.

Thus far all had gone well with him, and he could now place entire confidence in the devotion he had succeeded in inspiring in the object of his choice. He had made Camilla love him, employing all those gentle arts of wooing in which he was an adept, and laying siege to her affections in the school of Petrarch and Boccaccio, a code forever new to fresh experience.

The halcyon brooding on her nest, rocked on the azure wave, so familiar in the frescoed design of the palace halls, was the comparison with his own estate that recurred to his mind on this memorable occasion.

Had he been questioned by some grim spectre of misfortune, at the moment, as to the security of his position, he would have replied, smilingly, that he had plumbed the character of father and stepmother, while Camilla was prepared to do his lightest bidding.

In this agreeable country, sought by him in guise of a modern Columbus, the tedious details of civil and religious rites, so irksome in other lands, were obviated. The count lapsed from puzzled increduli-

ty to exhilaration when he realized that the nuptial knot could have bound Camilla to him with very few formalities, indeed, had the lady been minded to espouse him in opposition to the prejudices of her friends. The circumstances not warranting such elopement, the wedding was to take place at the house of Donald Belt, with a Protestant service, as a compromise between the differences of faith of the participants. Donald Belt was unwilling to give away his daughter in a Roman Catholic cathedral, while the count cherished the slightest possible reluctance to a similar ceremony in the neighboring church of St. Jerome; hence the noonday marriage at the house, to be followed by a breakfast and reception, and the departure of bride and bridegroom for Washington, previous to a speedy return to Europe.

The count slept late that morning, for, according to his creed, time is made for slaves. When he had risen he drank a glass of cold water and a cup of black coffee. He next smoked a cigarette, and, singing a favorite aria, opened the shutters of the window, in order to inspect himself in the gilded mirror of the hotel chamber. He scanned his reflected image with a care very unusual in mankind in general. The wisdom of Solomon would have been wholly at fault, as regarded this prospective bridegroom, for he never forgot his own face, or the manner of man he was, in turning away from the looking-glass. It would be impossible to exaggerate the value he attached to his personal appearance on this auspicious day. He surveyed himself anxiously, critically, in the mirror, as if he feared the advent of wrinkles and blemishes during sleep, such as might mar the smoothness of his check, but the day revealed only the usual fair and smiling exterior, and he was reassured.

He gave his mustache a vigorous and jaunty twist, and, in moving his elbow, dislodged several canes, which, in falling, struck the mirror with their handles of metal and ivory. The glass cracked. The count made a grimace.

"That is unlucky," he meditated, without being too much daunted by the incident. "Una disgrazia non vieu mai sola."

The conspicuous casement of a barber across the street attracted his attention.

"It is true," he said aloud, as if in response to the invitation tendered, and passed his hand across his chin. "I must be freshly shaved before my breakfast."

Now the Count Della Stella, actuated by commendable motives of economy, had brought no servant with him to America, a thriftiness which promised, in the present instance, to fulfil the old warning concerning penny wisdom and pound folly. In military service he relied upon a faithful orderly, while in foreign lands the attend-

ance of hotel menials could very well suffice for his simple requirements. The clerk of the modern caravansary where he lodged during his sojourn in New York was known to have subsequently expressed surprise at the length of his title and the splendor of pedigree in a guest of such unobtrusive bearing. Caution of the Machiavellian type led him to take no one into his confidence.

The count did not summon the barber to him, but sought the barber, as had been his custom since his arrival.

The barber was a stout person, of much self-esteem, and enjoying a large connection. His head was as bald as a billiard-ball, while the lustrous blackness of his whiskers suggested the frequent application of one of the coloring mixtures in the showcase, highly extolled by means of attendant placards. At first the chief had bestowed his personal skill on the foreigner, induced by curiosity and professional vanity, but finding the customer uncommunicative, owing to the lather of soap in process of application, and an imperfect knowledge of the English language, he had turned the count over to minions no less proficient than himself.

To-day Destiny, in the form of a nimble young man, with a pair of light gray eyes as keen as the razors he was capable of wielding, hovered near the door and ushered in the customer. Destiny seated the hapless victim in a reclining-chair, swathed him in linen, applied the foaming lather, and passed the gleaming steel across his face.

The count winked, coughed, and struggled to an erect position.

"What you have done?" he stammered with difficulty, as a fatal suspicion flashed through his mind.

"Done?" repeated the nimble assistant, coolly wiping the razor, as a Pagan priest might whet the knife for fresh sacrifice, and, at the same time elevating his voice to be more clearly understood. "No; I'm not quite done, sir. The other side is—"

The sentence remained unfinished, for the count, thrusting aside the arm held over him, sprang to his feet, wrenched a glass from the hand of the proprietor, and looked at himself. His mustache was gone. There could be no doubt of the dread catastrophe. The too zealous offender had swept the face of the count clean of every hair with the celerity of lightning. And this was his wedding-day!

The nobleman grew deadly white, then green and yellow; a change of complexion boding no good to an adversary, under ordinary circumstances. The present dilemma was a very extraordinary one, indeed. The victim of a blunder dashed the mirror on the floor, flung himself on the delinquent, and administered a kick, with a foot accustomed to having attached a jingling spur.

"What do you mean by that?" ejaculated the astonished and bewildered culprit, recoiling, and placing himself in an attitude of defence.

"Look out there!" cried the proprietor, bustling to the rescue.

"You have cut off my mustache, miscreant!" shrieked the count, glaring in impotent fury at his adversary.

"You didn't tell me not to cut it off," protested the assistant, flushed and indignant, in turn. "His very words were 'shave me entire.' That's what he said, anyhow," with an appealing glance around the saloon, as if in search of justice.

The entire establishment had been startled by the incident. Other assistants came skurrying forward, brandishing curling-irons and various implements of their craft, while more than one Good Samaritan of a customer hastened after, in different stages of the toilet, hair bristling on end from the hands of the shampooer, or half clipped in the interests of a military tonsure.

"A foreigner, eh? Shaved his mustache by mistake. Too bad! A man don't like to lose his mustache. Know how it is yourself."

"Look here, Tompkins, your fellows should be better trained, you know; and a foreigner, too."

Tompkins bowed, and waved the razor he held in a deprecatory manner.

"I'm very sorry, sir. Such a thing never happened before, and I'd rather give twenty dollars than to have it happen now, in this 'ere establishment. I'm sure, if anything can be done—"

For the first time since his arrival at New York, the Count Della Stella asserted his dignity, in public. He wrenched the linen towel from about his neck, and flung it at the barber, in silent contempt; an insult which aroused the ire of Mr. Tompkins, as a free-born citizen, and necessitated the interference of the beclipped and shampooed ones to soothe and restrain him, in turn.

"There! There! Keep your temper, Tompkins," admonished a tall man, whose auburn locks surrounded his countenance in eccentric spikes, much oiled, and, as yet, unsubdued by the mollifying influence of brush and comb.

"Don't do anything you'll be sorry for afterwards, Tompkins," added a little man, whose chin presented a curiously diversified surface of black stubble and snowy lather of shaving-soap.

A third individual, having one side of his head adorned with a profusion of frizzled curls, and the other limp and straight, placed himself before the count in such a way as to screen the resentful barber, and addressed him in the German of Heidelberg.

The count stared coldly at this mediator a moment, and then reverted to the assistant with eyes that launched flames.

"I do not kill you, but I will seek justice," he said, in a low and hissing tone.

He left the place, with a parting salutation to the group gathered about him as dignified as it was haughty.

"It's a good thing he hadn't a poniard handy," said the German scholar.

"Yes. Those Italians and Spaniards are perfect volcanoes when they get mad," echoed the tall man.

There was a murmur of assent among the customers, many of whom carried toy revolvers in their pockets at the moment.

The barber recovered himself, albeit with a visage still empurpled.

"I don't want his money," he announced, ruminatingly; then added: "Jeremiah Wilkins, you can take yourself to fields and pastures new about as quick—"

"I'm a-going right away," interrupted the assistant, sturdily. "If folks here can't give their orders in nothin' better than heathen Chinee I'll look out for another situation."

The count darted across the street to the hotel once more. The clerk stood in the entrance, surveying the world with the composure inherent in his class. He stared at the count, and inquired, blandly,

"Wish to call on some one in our house, sir?"

The count recoiled a step, stupefied by this fresh blow of misfortune. No recognition of his shaven countenance was discernible in the hard blue eyes of the clerk. Crestfallen, the lodger revealed his identity, only to be subsequently waylaid by a vigilant bell-boy and a suspicious Alsatian waiter, on the way to his room. The Alsatian waiter made a pantomimic gesture behind his back, expressive of derision, and the bell-boy grinned.

Once in his own chamber, the count approached the cracked mirror, and inspected his image, wrathfully. No; he would not have recognized himself. Was that long and dark face, disfigured by passion, the very features pinched by the emotion of the hour, the fair and smiling one of Azzolino Della Stella? Any man might have looked sombre, and even ferocious, under existing circumstances. Alas! A thin, scarlet line of scar on the upper lip added positive ugliness. He was hideous! He decided, in swift desperation, that any bride would consider him repulsive.

He consulted his watch, with haggard eyes. In one hour the wedding ceremony was to take place. What was to be done? Ready suspicion detected in the barber's assistant the hired tool of base conspiracy. How could he confront all these strangers with a scarred face? He did not fear Camilla, but he shrank from the public scrutiny and criticism. In one hour he was to be married!

In Tulip Place Donald Belt went about inspecting the arrangement of the rooms, his brow clouded, his step slow, and yet he experienced a certain satisfaction in the result.

Daylight had been admitted through the curtains, with the exception of the small boudoir, where the bride elected to be married. She had rendered this room as much as possible like a chapel, by means of tapestry, and an improvised altar at one extremity, where a profusion of tapers already twinkled in gilded candelabra. The monogram of the wedded pair, designed in white camellias, starred the rich draperies at intervals, while a fine copy of a Botticelli Madonna hung above the altar, between silver lamps.

Donald Belt glanced into this shrine through columns of snowy flowers, the capitals formed of budding sprays, and thence his eye reverted to the suite of apartments, all glistening with gilt and mosaic, where the roses and lilies ran riot in festoons, screens, and pyramids, interspersed with African palms. The ceiling of the main reception-room held, in pendulous form, a chime of floral wedding-bells.

"A little incense is needed to make it complete," he said aloud.

"I think one of the large parlors would have been better for the ceremony," said Mrs. Belt.

He glanced at his wife critically, and once more the expression of unwilling gratification swept over his massive features. His wife was a credit to him, an ornament to the spacious mansion, and he was satisfied.

Mrs. Belt was attired in white velvet, with a train of silver brocade. When she moved, whether in the shadow of the great palm masses, the twinkle of the tapers, the light of day, some beam smote sparks of intense brilliancy from the rays of diamonds clustered in her hair in the form of butterflies, hovering on her shoulder and breast, and thence gleaming over her draperies.

Yes, the hostess, radiant and proud on this day of Camilla's marriage, was creditable to the taste of her husband. He refrained from telling her as much by word or look. He was not demonstrative by nature.

"A smile abroad is oft a scowl at home."

The master of the house made a final tour of the dining-room, and gave an order to the servants. If Camilla must marry the foreigner, her wedding-breakfast should be a memorable event.

There was something curiously suggestive of waiting in the fairy palace, about the feast prepared, of which even the practical soul of Donald Belt may have been aware. A swan of white roses rested on a cushion of purple pansies, before the seat of the bridal couple; silver and crystal sparkled with a frosty gleam. Soon the murmur of many voices would mingle about the table, wine stain the delicate bubbles of glass, the elaborate temples of sugar and pastry be crushed by expectant consumers, moulded cream and jelly lose

form. In the interval the expectant, waiting aspect of the wedding banquet was strange. Donald Belt passed his hand across his brow, and ascribed the doubt to his own dissatisfaction at the union. His equanimity was restored by the thought that the cost of the banquet would find mention in sundry journals.

Mrs. Belt, undisturbed by similar reflections, admired the bridal gifts, the vases, bronzes, gold and silver ware, jewelry, and enamels suitable to the occasion. Conspicuous amidst the modern luxury were the historical fan, and a small case, surmounted by a coronet, containing pearls, the present of a German sovereign to a knight of the Della Stella.

Guests began to arrive, and foremost among the number was Mrs. Monteith. The lady leaned on the arm of her father, and was closely followed by her brother and son. A kindred spark of excitement and curiosity glowed in the bosom of each member of the St. Nicholas family. Mr. St. Nicholas was intent on criticising his neighbor. William St. Nicholas was alternately satirical, boisterous, and silent. Willy the younger evinced his usual good spirits. Mrs. Monteith had recovered animation, and was stately in her costume of black satin, with petticoat of Persian lilac satin, fringed with gold flowers.

The clergyman waited in the library.

Above-stairs a bevy of bridesmaids, resembling soft clouds of cream-colored silks and tulle veils, were gathered in a group, each carrying a little basket of golden filigree, filled with yellow roses, and an ivory fan, mounted with point lace. Near them stood Camilla's page, the son of Mrs. Southby, a pretty boy of eight years, with blond curls, attired in a suit of ruby velvet, of the period of George II., with embroidered waistcoat and three-cornered hat. This precocious child reaped extended popularity for his part in the ceremonies of the day, as his mother's friends were never weary of hearing him repeat the most minute particulars of the events transpiring above and below stairs in the Belt mansion.

The bride had not yet quitted her dressing-room, where skilful hands had spread about her the traditional folds of shimmering white satin, wrought with lace and pearl, and enveloped her in the traditional Brussels point veil.

A very composed and assured bride, this, prepared to bravely undergo the ordeal of ceremony before her. Little Mademoiselle Aimée, in soft white raiment, and rosebuds, hovered near, wistful, pale, and silent.

"You must not look sad, *ma mie*," said Camilla, as sprays of orange-blossoms were attached to her corsage and hair. "I shall keep you with me, always."

"Yes, Miss Belt," the little Aimée meekly acquiesced, but there was no enthusiasm in her tone.

Camilla surveyed her own splendor, as reflected in the mirrors, with satisfaction. Here was the very pride of life, accompanying robust health and high spirits, and no modest, trembling maiden, drooping shyly beneath the weight of her bridal crown. A feather of brilliants held Camilla's veil attached to the orange-blossoms, stones of the purest water encircled her throat, bracelets of pearls clasped her wrists. She scanned her own face without flinching. She had chosen her own path, and must follow it to the end. All preparation had been completed. There was no flutter of feminine doubt, haste, and confusion perceptible in her manner. The going-away costume was visible through an open door, placed on a form to display the golden-brown brocade and velvet, with sable margin. The bride pursued:

"I intended to do so many things, this winter," adjusting the pendant of diamonds and pearls at her own throat. "This was to have been my season, Aimée. I was going to get up a fair, which should have been a market, with all the ladies in peasant costume, and seated under red umbrellas. Then I meant to start a perfect rage for private theatricals. We could have organized an amateur dramatic company, and played in the theatre of the Meerschaum Club, for some charity. See what it is to marry a foreign soldier, Aimée, and be carried off beyond the ocean!"

Aimée glanced at her wayward patroness, with eyebrows slightly elevated. Camilla's matter-of-fact tone, at such a moment, shocked and amazed her. She seemed to breathe once more the scent of flowers on the window-ledge of the *haute cité* of Geneva, gray and peaceful, after the hot disputes of long-dead philosophers and theologians, and a sentiment of homesickness oppressed her.

Another wedding recurred to her memory, that of her school friend Rosalie, and the young professor from Zurich, of German origin, with straight brown hair and spectacles. One of the smaller hotels of the town had been invaded for the wedding-dinner, where the Père Heroart presided, as host, with a rubicund countenance, and wearing a white waistcoat. Later the bridesmaids and youth danced to the music of a cracked piano. Rosalie had wept beneath her veil of tulle, and the matrons, in their gowns of good black silk, had wiped their eyes as well, seated on benches against the wall. The porters, wearing green aprons, had added an arch of evergreen to the entrance, as a fitting tribute to sentiment, and even the cook, in his white cap, had peered through a door to obtain a glimpse of the bride, while the *femme-de-chambre* of each *étage* was in a flutter of excitement, snatching a brief reprieve from the fresh-

linen and hot-water serving of duty, in the rapt contemplation of orange blossoms.

Here was a bridal, conventional and pleasing, within the ken of little Aimée.

"I am ready," announced Camilla, in a firm and clear tone. "We must not tax too severely the patience of the good people waiting."

She joined her bridesmaids, who surrounded her with greetings and congratulations.

The little page strutted forward, conscious of his dignity, and received a kiss from the bride.

"We mustn't go down yet," piped the page, with an eye on Camilla's train.

"Why, my dear?"

"The bridegroom hasn't come," retorted the *enfant terrible.* "He's quarter of an hour late, already. Mr. Belt says so."

Camilla smiled.

"Poor count! He has not our dreadful American ideas of punctuality," she said.

Her lips grew dry. The bridesmaids, embarrassed, toyed with the roses in their gilded baskets, and unfurled their exquisite fans. Mademoiselle Aimée clasped her hands together, in a nervous and involuntary gesture of apprehension. Camilla looked at the faces of her companions, and her own hardened. A clock struck a silvery chime, and arrested her attention. The quarter mentioned by the child was, in reality, half an hour. A man lived on the earth capable of being half an hour late at his wedding with her, Camilla Belt. All the latent egotism of her own nature rose in arms at the mere suggestion. She was no longer smiling and calm, her features became set.

"Come," she said, at length, "let us go down-stairs."

The bridesmaids coughed, faltered, and held back. The little page stood firmly on his legs before her, holding his cocked hat in his hand.

"No. Mr. Belt said we were to wait here, and not show ourselves too soon," he protested, earnestly. "I heard two of the ushers, on the stairs, say that p'raps he wouldn't come at all."

"Ah!" was Camilla's mechanical comment.

"What a fearful child you are for telling fibs, Charley," exclaimed the first bridesmaid, taking him by the arm, and shaking him.

But the little page withdrew his arm and would not be silenced. His precocious vanity was flattered by the post assigned him, and by wearing the beautiful doublet of ruby velvet, in which his photograph was to be taken after the ceremony.

"They called it a lark," he burst out, irrepressibly. "What's the good of dressing-up, then?"

A moment of chilling silence ensued, when the hum of voices below-stairs became louder. Camilla said, very gently,

"My dear little boy, I am going down-stairs. You may carry my train, or not, as you please."

"All right," chirped the page, and made a plunge after the heavy draperies of satin.

The bridesmaids followed, stealing furtive glances at each other.

A vision of laces, flowers, and sparkling gems dazzled those in the vicinity of the great stairway, and then vanished into the temporary seclusion of a distant room. The bride had appeared. Where was the groom?

The Count Della Stella, crushed by the true misfortune that had befallen him, remained inactive, mute, paralyzed. The tide of passion which had surged to his brain, and imperilled the life of the assistant barber, had ebbed back to his heart. He bitterly regretted the absence of a confidential friend, or a servant, whose services would have been invaluable in such an emergency. His outraged vanity and smarting dignity had not permitted him to cherish for a moment the idea of evading the day's ceremonial, or of being a second late in presenting himself at the mansion of his intended bride. There were too many interests at stake. Better appear shaven, bald, disfigured before all those enemies, the mocking wedding-guests, than yield his precedence to some eager usurper. Expedients came to his mind, with all the brilliancy of inspiration, during the precious interval of time remaining to him. Would Camilla fail to recognize him, as the stupid minions of the hotel had done? His brow grew damp at the very suggestion.

He again sought the mirror, and gazed with horror at his altered visage, nor did the consolatory thought that his mustache would have opportunity to grow again during the honeymoon reassure his dejected spirit.

He rang the bell and sought counsel of the Alsatian waiter, a high-shouldered man, with a peaked countenance devoid of beard, and flaxen hair which grew in a topknot above a narrow forehead. The count explained the situation with pathetic volubility, and the sympathies of the Alsatian were quickened by a liberal fee slipped into his palm.

The result of their mutual deliberations was that Mercury sped away in search of a selection of false mustaches, to be obtained in a certain locality familiar to him.

Left alone, the bridegroom made his toilet with a feverish agita-

tion in marked contrast with the tranquillity of the bride. The stratagem pleased him. A secure confidence in the absolute devotion of Camilla was the anchor to which he held.

Ah, Christopher Columbus, wisest and most courageous of navigators! How about the shifting of the helm, the current of baffling winds, the turning of the tide?

The Alsatian waiter returned, in a breathless condition, with a box under his arm.

The count raised the lid with trembling fingers, and discovered several red, a black, and a gray mustache.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is the wrong box!" gasped Mercury, in consternation.

The count held to his lip, first the black, and then a red mustache, with such startling result that he realized his own mother would not have known him. The rumor might circulate that he was an impostor; the bride shriek and faint at the very sight of him. Even now success was in his grasp, and he knew it. In an enemy's country his fate hung on a hair. The crisis necessitated confronting the situation coolly and philosophically. Personal vanity whispered,

"Send the Alsatian back to the costumer, with a clipping of brown hair, for a pattern."

He listened to the tempter, and he fell.

The Alsatian departed with haste, fingering a fresh fee, for the emergency necessitated lavish expenditure of money, and adroitly glided down the back stairs, in evasion of the proprietor, only to fall into the clutches of the ubiquitous clerk, at a side door. The clerk, sternly discrediting Mercury's explanations, dragged him before the bar of justice. What did the Alsatian mean by slipping out of the house at that hour? It was not until the contents of the box had been investigated that he was permitted to depart, with a burst of laughter on the part of landlord and clerk.

Had the Count Della Stella reposed confidence in the hotel, in this emergency, the hotel would have aided him, to a man, and this faithful narration need not have been written. The accident had been too sudden for him to manipulate the material of human nature about him.

Precious moments passed, and the gentleman paced the floor, a prey to indecision, and determined resolve not to wait longer, listening to every footfall, and, in his weakness, ever granting the messenger a reprieve of five more minutes.

At length the Alsatian reappeared, triumphant, if exhausted, and exhibited a choice selection of brown mustaches. The count seized the first one, and attached it to his lip by means of the gummed surface. Ah, at last! The looking-glass reflected his former self, the

silky appendage more bristling and crinkly, perhaps, yet martial in curl. He descended to the attendant carriage just as one of the Belt servants reached the hotel, and gleaned the interesting particulars of the mishap from the Alsatian.

Seated in the carriage the count drew forth a pocket-mirror, and did not cease from contemplating himself during the drive. It was true he was an hour late, but his presence, however tardy, would atone for all delay.

The equipage reached the corner of Tulip Place, when the bridegroom had the misfortune to sneeze, and one half of the mustache fell off. He groped on the floor of the vehicle for the missing fragment, found, and replaced it. In vain! The woven mesh had lost the slight element of adhesiveness which previously retained it. The count flushed crimson with anger and alarm, and heroically prepared to sacrifice the whole false emblem of former beauty. He sought to detach the remaining half, and without success, for the more he wrenched and tugged at it the more closely it clung to his lip. He saw the gate of paradise open before him, and inviting him to enter. How could he enter with the half of a false mustache on his face? He would be shunned as a lunatic. No one would listen to his tale of woe. "Il faut reculer d'un pas pour mieux sauter," he muttered, and, shielding his face with his pocket-handkerchief, he managed to make the coachman understand that he wished to return to the hotel. Such was the frantic energy of his gesture, and the appeal visible in the eyes peering above the handkerchief, that the coachman wheeled about, applied whip to the horses, and rattled away at the utmost speed.

The hotel regained, the count rushed to his chamber and the cracked mirror, where the fragment of mustache had just come off, in his fingers, yielding to an effort which brought the water to his eyes, when a peremptory rap on the door was followed by the entrance of Donald Belt.

"Are you aware, sir, that you have been expected for an hour and a half?" he demanded, abruptly.

The count smiled a sickly smile.

"A thousand pardons!' he said, apologetically. "Am I, then, so late?"

The two men confronted and measured each other.

"If Camilla could only see this cocksparrow of her choice with my eyes," thought the father. "She shall be made to see him. Why, the fellow has lost his mustache."

The torrent of indignant protest was checked on his lips, and a gleam of humor appeared in his eyes.

"I am ready, now," added the count, speaking with an effort, and

having the crestfallen mien of a gorgeous tropical bird when robbed of its lawful rainbow plumage.

"I think we had better defer the matter until another day," replied Donald Belt, with an unmistakable ring of triumph in his tone.

During this ordeal of suspense, in waiting, the Belt mansion had been filled with the murmur of conversation. Each guest endeavored to appear at ease, and as if nothing had occurred of an unusual character.

In the distant apartment whither the bridal party had withdrawn Mademoiselle Aimée decorously turned the leaves of an album of aquarelles for the inspection of the bridesmaids, who discussed the merits of the respective drawings with the more eagerness because they saw none of them. The little page had waxed cross, until he discovered a music-box in the corner, imprisoned in a church, which he was doing his best to investigate and destroy.

Camilla stood at a window, with her back turned to her companions, and her eyes fixed on vacancy. Already a long time seemed to have elapsed since she was decked for the bridal, and the weight of the ornaments in her hair hurt her brain. She saw the St. Nicholas house from the casement. From time to time the thin and shrivelled profile of old Mrs. St. Nicholas appeared at the window of her morning-room, like a fate.

Every carriage that rolled over the pavement set her pulses throbbing afresh. Surely the recreant bridegroom had arrived, and her anger must be controlled to meet him. When the carriage passed on, and the summons did not come, now dreaded by her strained senses, she breathed once more with a sentiment of relief.

Finally the cold silence was broken by the rustle of a rich dress. Mrs. Belt entered, pale and agitated, and the bridesmaids shrank back, and held aloof. She approached the rigid figure of the bride.

"Camilla!" deprecatingly.

"Well! Has he come?" was the dry response.

"No, my dear. Oh, Camilla, he cannot come! I fear—"

Camilla extended her hand, and closed her eyes a moment, to steady her nerves.

"Wait! I know what you wish to say. I can bear it. He is dead."

"No, no! Some accident has happened to the count. I do not understand it all, yet, but it is not death, my dear. He is safe."

Mrs. Belt strove to encircle her stepdaughter with her arms, fearing faintness, but Camilla shook her off.

"If he is not dead I will never forgive him," she cried, in a hoarse and altered voice.

The little page yawned. "I thought there were to be lots of bonbons," he remarked, kicking a footstool, discontentedly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JEST OF THE TOWN.

"The folly of all follies
Is to be love-sick for a shadow."—"Queen Mary."

THERE are moments in all lives when, in the troubled dreams of a fevered brain, the sleeper is forced to perform some untried part on a stage full of lurking pitfalls, and watched by countless unpitying eyes. The shadows gather and threaten, the lights waver, the spectators are silent, menacing, rising rank behind rank in some limitless amphitheatre, while the tongue declaims, goading the dreamer to fresh effort and fresh failure.

Camilla Belt had experienced similar emotions as she stood at the window awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. She was the one unarmed among the indifferent throng. She was the one unmasked, with the doubt, anger, and humiliation plainly discernible on her features, where all wore the smiling mask of society. Incensed by the delay, first hinted at by the prattling little page, pride would have led her to perform her part in the ceremonial of the day had the count arrived within the hour. Evasion in escape had come to her mind, after that lapse of waiting. She had been insulted before her world, and would be held up to public ridicule henceforth, as the victim of an absurd trick, some hesitation of a suitor who dared not marry her, hampered by other ties, and therefore withdrew.

When the stepmother had broken the tidings that Donald Belt had gone, personally, to learn the truth, the servant having returned with a perplexing account of the circumstances, discredited by the family, Camilla had resolutely withdrawn to her own rooms, closing the door on all intruders. Her eyes were hot, her lips dry and parched, a tumult of angry blood hummed in her ears, and surged to her brain. Her superb dress and veil added their weight to an insupportable situation. An impulsive rather than passive temperament, even in trouble, she unfastened the jewels, scattered the flowers, and, divesting herself of the satin robe, flung it in a heap on the floor. She contemplated the confused mass of finery with stupefaction, and a certain element of fright, swift and cold. What should she

have been had she still worn these things? A lie! A living lie, to herself and to others!

Possibly the tragedy of the act, the renunciation of her bridal emblems, stimulated the revolt in her breast. The casting aside of the lace and flowers was a gage of defiance to the Count Della Stella that might well make him tremble for his cause. Never would she consent to assume them again for his sake. He was not dead, stricken inanimate, and yet he had failed to keep his word. The haste with which she thrust away her splendid apparel evinced a fear of wavering in any weakness of indecision. The misfortune that might have befallen him did not touch or even interest her, softening, even in baseless conjecture, the stony hardness of her bitter wrath and resentment. All magnanimity of forgiveness was very remote from her mood, just then. The Count Della Stella had passed out of her life.

The familiar objects about her remained unchanged. Why did they acquire a new value in her eyes? She did not weep, but uttered a little gasp of wonder. Something strange, awful, and perhaps ludicrous had happened to her. If one could laugh, and forget it! And the man, the lover, the companion chosen for a lifetime! Had he ever existed? Did he still exist?

She threw herself prone on a couch, sheltered in an alcove, and buried her face in her hands. She endeavored to stifle feeling and suspend thought, by an effort of will, and yet her mind would follow, with painful clearness, the movements below stairs. The guests were departing with celerity, glad to escape from an embarrassing situation.

The sarcastic profile of old Mrs. St. Nicholas rose before her with vivid distinctness. She beheld Mrs. Monteith, tranquil yet amused, a Laodicean, moved neither to excessive interest nor reproach. Surely Willy Monteith would share the opinion of the ushers, quoted by the little page, and consider the non-appearance of the bridegroom as "a lark." And William St. Nicholas, what of him? In her prostration and irritated sensibility she felt the scorn of his glance once more burn into her heart and brain. A deep flush suffused her face. He had the right to despise her, this indifferent and nonchalant neighbor. She had fully granted him this right, by her own conduct. She had acted according to her lights, and tried to grasp a title.

She could see the family cross the street to the watchful old lady, peering out of the window, and hear the judgment that would inevitably fall from those withered lips on the folly of Donald Belt's daughter and the ostentation of Joseph Belt's heiress. The well-born and self-respecting need assume no such attitude of aggression

to maintain their place. She undervalued her own power in this very reaction of chagrin and mortification.

Colonel Crosbie Ellery King was whispering a parting word to Mrs. Southby, behind that lady's fan; Captain Rawdon walked apart, in meditative mood, pondering on what might have been. Each gentleman could pluck a feather from the wing of hope, and derive good auguries from the mishap of the day. Let them wait!

The tapers must be extinguished in the little room dedicated to the wedding ceremony by means of lamps and altar-picture. The white swan must droop and fade amidst the untouched crystal of the wedding-feast. Camilla beheld it all, with her hands clasped over her eyes. One chord remained paralyzed, the count. She did not even marvel, with vague feminine curiosity, what accident had happened to detain, and justify his absence.

Thus time passed, and her spirit, like Alciphron, seemed to sway in darkness, blown about by every gust of wind.

A moist and friendly nose touched her wrist; the dog Turco was seated beside the couch, regarding her with steadfast canine devotion. Turco was a dog with a history, and, like all heroes, wore his honors with unassuming dignity. A water-spaniel of unusual size, he had originally belonged to the owner of a bathing-machine on the French coast, and had saved the lives of eight sailors by carrying a corked line to them, on a rock. The celebrity gained by this deed, for which the commune granted him a medal, led to the purchase of Turco by a German prince. Camilla Belt had found him at a Vienna dog-show, the medal around his neck, and silver bracelets on his paws, a mark of affection on the part of his deceased master, the prince. She had chosen the spaniel among poodles of every degree of intelligence, lean Russian and Lithuanian hounds, and pugs.

She took the dog's head between her hands, with an irrepressible movement of surprise and gratification. "Dear old Turco, you are sorry for me!" she exclaimed; "I believe you are my best friend."

The heavy and resolute footstep of Donald Belt became audible in the next room.

"Camilla."

"Yes, father."

She struggled to an erect posture, and pushed back her dishevelled hair.

Donald Belt was relieved to discover no traces of weeping on her face. He hated tears. A crisis of feminine grief moved him to helpless exasperation. His daughter spared him such an ordeal. For his own part he had returned home from the hotel, after the interview with his prospective son-in-law, determined not to mince matters with the bride. Heroic treatment would have been merciful,

in the end, with a weak and sentimental girl. Camilla was neither weak nor sentimental. His pride had been wounded by the events of the day, but his heart was strangely lightened.

"Do you wish to know the truth?" he inquired, with his usual directness of speech.

"Yes," said Camilla, with a spasm contracting her features, quickly controlled.

They regarded each other, and similar emotions brought out, in strong relief, the resemblance of parent and child.

The dog yawned, and stretched himself on the rug at their feet, in the attitude of the Lombard lion carved on balustrade and gateway.

Then Donald Belt briefly told her the truth, sparing no detail, and avoiding all comment, until he had finished the recital.

Camilla burst into a peal of laughter, so wild and shrill that the echo of her own voice startled her overwrought faculties.

"Don't!" said her father, firmly, and brought her a glass of water.

"Tell me again," gasped Camilla, when she had drank the water, and her altered features revealed that she had drained a far more bitter cup.

Donald Belt repeated the statement, still without the embellishment of comment, and observing her keenly the while. This time she did not laugh, but listened with lowered eyelids, and repulsed the spaniel with her foot.

"He wishes to see you, and beg your forgiveness. He will prove an able pleader," said the father. "Perhaps you had better wait until his mustache grows again, for I warn you he is a poor creature without one."

Camilla winced.

"I never wish to see him again," she said, harshly.

"You are sure?" insisted her father, with eagerness.

"Very sure. Send him away."

"That's right, my girl. Take plenty of time in choosing a husband."

He stooped to kiss her, stumbling over Turco in so doing, and patted her shoulder reassuringly. Camilla shrank from the caress. Her wounds were too recent for amelioration from such balm of consolation as her father's blunt commendation, and yet her heart was moved towards this natural protector as it had never been before, now that she had so nearly lost him.

"The count will await his chance of reconciliation," warned Donald Belt. "He will not relinquish his hold on such a prize easily, I assure you."

Camilla stiffened to icy rigidity.

"I will never see him again," she panted. "Tell him so. If he waited a year it could make no difference."

Then there was silence between father and child.

In the meanwhile conspiracy was rife below-stairs. Mrs. Belt, on whom the most irksome burden of the day's ceremonial had fallen, longed to summon the count, and learn the truth from his own lips. She had been forced to move about among the wedding-guests, a beautiful hostess, her very train of silver brocade and gleaming jewels commanding respect from the world, in an unusual situation. Ignorant of the true cause of delay while undergoing this ordeal, her loyalty to the count did not waver, nor did she question that the difficulty, whatever it might be, would be satisfactorily adjusted in the presence of the tardy bridegroom, as the frost of midnight melts in the first rays of the morning sun. The departure of the guests and return of her husband from his visit to the delinquent failed to shake her allegiance to the culprit. The wedding was deferred, and might be more private. She would smooth the path for the lovers. She made one of those audacious movements which are ever possible to the timid and repressed nature, when Donald Belt sought his daughter's retreat. She attempted to interfere, to serve as a more diplomatic and conciliatory messenger herself. Her husband was astonished by her unusual attitude of defiance.

"I intend to tell Camilla the truth," he had said, grimly.

"Let me go, instead," Mrs. Belt had entreated, all her soul glowing in her lustrous eyes. "Don't come between them! You don't know what you are doing, Donald. I will explain the accident to Camilla."

He put her aside, contemptuously. Was he to receive dictation from a silly woman? He went up-stairs without another word, and she did not venture to follow him. Mrs. Belt, foiled, would not acknowledge herself defeated. She withdrew to her own room, and wrote a note to the Count Della Stella, counselling patience, on his part, and a speedy appearance to soothe the indignant bride. Personal sympathy lent eloquence to her written words.

The letter written, addressed, and sealed, she bethought her of the best means of despatching it, without incurring the wrath of the master of the house. An indolent temperament, dreading reprimand, had long before rendered her deceitful. Who could she trust to deliver the note at the hotel? Her glance fell on Mademoiselle Aimée, who sat in a corner, stupefied by the *contretemps* of the day.

Aimée secretly disapproved of Camilla's choice, but she was crushed by the sufferings of her friend, without wishing to intrude her sympathy. The matter was terribly tragic to Aimée. Mrs. Belt

aroused her with the inquiry, if she would cloak and veil herself to take the note to the hotel door. Aimée hesitated.

"Is it for Miss Belt's happiness, dear madame?" she demanded, clasping her hands.

"Of course it is for her happiness," retorted Mrs. Belt.

"Then I will go," rejoined Aimée, with a resolute expression.

A little figure, closely enveloped in a mantle, glided away from the Belt mansion, in one direction, just as a carriage approached from the other, and the count, also wrapped in a cloak, demanded admission to the presence of Mrs. Belt. Anxiety and a sombre melancholy were visible on his features, induced by his recent conversation with Donald Belt, and Mrs. Belt shrank from the fierce reproach of his dark eyes. Could it be that the misfortune of an hour's delay had changed all for him? The listener trembled at the torrent of excuses, lamentations, and upbraiding falling from the shaven lips of the Count Della Stella, that curled with the bitterness of his wrong. The next moment she was no less moved by his fervent supplications to be brought into the presence of Camilla. After that, if she banished him forever, he would go without a murmur.

Mrs. Belt listened to the language of passion, with parted lips and dilating eyes. She was no longer young, and her hair was white, yet she resembled the child who hearkens, for the first time, to the music of the sea-shell. Once in her own life there had been a divine harmony, had her faculties been sufficiently fine to hear it. She could only advise hope and patience—vague and faltering assurances, silenced by the entrance of Donald Belt, with the intelligence that his daughter could not again receive the suitor, and preferred to consider all as ended between them.

The count gazed at Donald Belt with profound amazement and incredulity. He was the victim of a dark conspiracy, and all finesse of delay had been wholly dispensed with, as unnecessary. He was intensely miserable. A cold shudder of dread passed over his frame. Surely the wedding-guests had been dismissed in summary fashion. The dalliance of an hour before a mirror had changed the course of his life. Ah, thrice-accursed barber!

Mademoiselle Aimée slipped around the corner of Tulip Place, and crossed the square beyond, holding the letter tightly in one little hand. Much would result from this note, she felt convinced, and she was sacrificing her own feelings in delivering it. Did she not owe more to Camilla? Aimée realized that she would not long remain in the household of the Count Della Stella.

She traversed the square, and met Willy Monteith, whose bearing was the more innocent that he had watched her leave the house, and outflanked her steps by an adroit movement in the same direction.

"You are out late, mademoiselle," he said, with a roguish glance that brought a warm glow to Aimée's cheek even beneath her thick veil.

"I am not afraid," she replied, demurely.

"You are not afraid because I am here to take care of you," retorted the youth, standing before her, tall and fair, in the winter twilight.

What wonder if Mrs. Belt's dutiful messenger felt her pulses thrill with a sweet surprise to find such a champion unexpectedly arisen of her insignificant little person, late abroad amidst the turmoil of the town? If a meteor had flashed across her path, from the distant heavens, its presence could have been no more unforeseen and dazzling.

"You are kind," she murmured.

"You are lovely," he retorted.

As for Willy Monteith, there can be no doubt that an inherent fondness for mischief enhanced the charm of stolen interviews with the French girl, while maternal opposition added zest to the pursuit of Aimée. Why should his mother be so very severe on this pretty maiden, and watch her, on all occasions, as a cat does a mouse? The boyish element in his character was rapidly yielding to the manly instinct of wishing to shield Aimée in the dark streets. Willy was discovering a novel and inexplicable delight in studying Aimée's mobile features, and awaiting her piquant replies to his words.

She permitted him to walk beside her to the hotel, and *en route* he learned the history of the count's misadventure. He listened in silence, and insisted on delivering the letter to the bell-boy, at the hotel door.

And Camilla? She was aware that the Count Della Stella was in the house, breathed the same atmosphere, and a word would bring him to her side. A wild and reckless impulse moved her to confront and upbraid him, then a glance at her own pale face and dishevelled hair deterred her.

She arose, lifted the lace veil, and drew it around her, gazing forth at the waning light of day through the mist of rich web. Her eyes grew dreamy, while the lines about her mouth did not relax. The folds of the veil clung about her and suffocated her. The filmy thing was a badge, but already a badge of the past. The delicately wrought flowers of the mesh were figures of intangible visions, shadows vanished before realized.

Camilla pushed aside the veil with her firm hand, and it fell, unheeded, to the ground. Released from its embrace she breathed more freely. The twilight had stolen over the brightness of everything, slowly and imperceptibly, and a ray of the street lamp already flickered on the ceiling. Her arms sank to her sides, and her head

drooped. She was alone in the gathering darkness. She wished to be alone. Stay! The moist nose of Turco again touched her wrist. Fiercely repulsing human sympathy, the appeal of the animal moved her. She put her arms around the neck of the dog that had saved life, battling with the waves of a stormy sea, and wept unrestrainedly.

"Why did this wretched man ever come at all, Turco? He has only troubled and wounded us," she sobbed, echoing the query of many souls, bewildered by the tangled threads of existence.

Willy Monteith was late to dinner that night. He entered the family circle with sparkling eyes and scarcely suppressed laughter.

Camilla's morbid conviction that the St. Nicholas household would be unsparing in criticism of her wedding-day found ample confirmation in reality. Mrs. St. Nicholas experienced more interest in Donald Belt's daughter than on any previous occasion. The old lady gave dignity to the present situation by many reminiscences of similar catastrophes, dating back to colonial times, and each involving mystery, sentiment, and subsequent eccentricity on the part of the deserted bride. The narrator imparted a quaint and pensive charm to these histories which was not without influence on her hearers, as if she had taken from the depths of some cedar-wood chest the withered bridal bouquet, with its shrivelled ribbons, the yellowed gloves, and oddly fashioned bonnet of a past generation.

Her son listened with marked uneasiness and impatience; her daughter with a musing smile.

"Camilla Belt is capable of any eccentricity," was the comment of the latter, as she tasted her soup. "I should not wonder if she eloped with her coachman, or never married at all. She might become a sort of Queen Bess in her spinsterhood."

"You seem to have Camilla Belt on the brain," said William St. Nicholas, dryly.

Mrs. Monteith applied her napkin to her lips delicately.

"Colonel King and Captain Rawdon may have a chance after all," she added.

Willy, the younger, flushed and excited, fixed his eyes on his uncle, as he took his seat.

"What a pity it is that you wear a beard, Uncle William!" he exclaimed. "Would nothing induce you to part with it?"

"I dare say you would like to borrow it," was the imperturbable response.

"You see, we are to have a new barber set up for Tulip Place and the Bachelors'," continued Willy, with a fresh access of hilarity. "Sam Hardinge has taken him under his protection already. His

name is Jeremiah Wilkins. Oh, he is a first-rate barber, I can tell you."

The youth launched into a vivacious description of the cause of the bridegroom's absence on that day, avoiding all mention of his recent encounter with Mademoiselle Aimée Rauvier. When questioned by his mother as to how he knew so much about the affair, he parried the inquiry by the statement that the story was town talk.

Old Mrs. St. Nicholas shook her head.

"No, my dear child," she asserted, impressively, "the excuse of a shaved mustache will do to amuse schoolboys, but there is another reason behind all that."

"A helpless foreigner within your tent," began Mrs. Monteith, and yielded to sudden laughter, in turn.

"What a go!" cried Willy. "He couldn't attend his own wedding because Jeremiah Wilkins had whipped off his mustache."

"Willy, I would not rejoice in the success of a mean trick," admonished the uncle, severely.

Willy paused and reddened. He was unaccustomed to reprimand from such a source.

"It was not a trick," he protested.

"It looks very much like one," said William St. Nicholas. "*Noblesse oblige*, my boy."

"I call that hard lines," exclaimed the injured nephew. "The whole thing was an accident. New York boys are not sneaks, whatever else they may be, sir. That's no reason why Jeremiah Wilkins should be left to starve, though," with a return of former gayety.

"Ah, I understand," said William, the elder, relenting. "You wish me to sacrifice the pride of my manhood, my beard, to furnish legitimate employment for Jeremiah Wilkins."

The jest of the town! The latest straw floating on the eddy of gossip was the incident concerning the mustache of the Count Della Stella. The town caught up the history, and laughed over it, ridiculing with merciless satire the participants. The barber's assistant, deprived of employment by a blunder, found himself wafted along to prosperity on the wave of a fickle notoriety. He was patronized by the clubs. A popular comedian added to his *repertoire* of popular songs "The Barber's Lament," a ditty which invariably brought down the house. Jeremiah Wilkins did not lose his head amidst these ovations, but, availing himself of the generosity of Mr. Sam Hardinge and other young gentlemen, opened a rival establishment to his late patron, and diligently plied brush and razor, while serving, himself, as an object of public curiosity.

What with the glibness acquired by Mr. Wilkins in repeating his tale to each new customer, and the natural diversity of the human

intellect in receiving impressions, not to mention of the human tongue in imparting them subsequently, the history of the count's mustache gained such exaggeration as to become wholly unrecognizable, save as a hairy appendage of the masculine countenance, in the ordering of nature.

Camilla, shunning observation, remained in her own rooms. There was a fever of unrest in her blood, her manner was haughty and suspicious to Aimée, her face grew thin and haggard. Did she ever reproach herself, later, for her repulsion of Aimée, absorbed in the selfish contemplation of a first sorrow? Trouble, doubt, pain, were new to her experience, but her will was unsubdued.

The count presented his claim to a final hearing, daily, and ever in some persuasive form, now awaiting her relenting mood in person, and again by means of letters, and Camilla's response was unvarying. She would not see him. Cruel and ungenerous she might be, and the incessant entreaties of her stepmother left her stubborn and unmoved. No; she would never see him again.

Donald Belt received the eager suppliant, and his daughter experienced a cowardly sense of relief in his stalwart protection. The missives which accumulated beneath the count's ready pen, in three languages, were returned unopened. He would not despair, for the spark of hope was kept alive by Mrs. Belt.

One day the latter hastened up-stairs to Camilla, with unwonted emotion perceptible in her face and manner.

"The count is here again. If you would only receive him in my little boudoir, I could easily manage that you were not disturbed. Your father is out."

The occasion seemed so propitious for a complete reconciliation between estranged lovers that Mrs. Belt tasted the sweetness of triumph in advance.

Camilla looked at her fixedly.

"I hate him," she said.

Mrs. Belt grew pale. Her air-castle vanished. She became confused, and a little pique mingled with her disappointment.

"So soon," she murmured, sadly.

"I only wish to forget he ever existed," added Camilla, with a sigh of weariness.

Mrs. Belt, thus cast upon her own resources, returned to the visitor, crestfallen, her bearing altered, her glance wavering and uneasy. She had rashly promised too much. If Camilla sided with her father the domestic battle would be a very unequal one, indeed. She took refuge in the assistance of Mademoiselle Aimée, employing her as an interpreter. The latter fulfilled her task with far more firmness than Mrs. Belt would have done.

The count accepted his dismissal with melancholy resignation. He was a great gentleman to the last, with the courtesy which must be inherent, and can so seldom be acquired. He bowed to Mrs. Belt with a grace that she felt could only be learned at courts.

"I do not understand the change in Miss Belt's sentiments towards me," he said, with unconscious pathos. "I shall never marry another. Dear madame, if her resolution is ever modified, pray inform me." Then he was gone.

"A perfect gentleman," sighed Mrs. Belt, whose hand he had kissed, and she brushed away a tear from the lashes of her brilliant eyes.

Another of life's illusions had been rudely dispelled. Was there any such thing as secure trust and happiness in the world.

Mademoiselle Aimée also shed a few sympathetic tears.

"It is all very strange," she murmured, thoughtfully.

"Camilla is just like her father," said Mrs. Belt, with the sudden display of spirit that nerves the Persian to spear a stray Turcoman, when unprotected, and at the mercy of the feebler nature.

The next day was the Sabbath. Donald Belt, who had left his daughter to follow her own course, addressed her, in his usual tones,

"Are you going to church, Camilla?"

She started, and raised her head.

"Yes," she replied.

"That's right," said the father. "I suppose a girl in your position need not hide, as if she were ashamed of herself, just because she has decided not to marry a foreigner."

Camilla's response was to select a modest costume of black silk, and then cast it aside in favor of another of velvet and fur.

The chimes of St. Jerome began to ring out on the clear air. She paused at the casement, and watched the groups pass, all flocking to the fashionable sanctuary. Colonel King stepped along jauntily, beside Mrs. Southby. She must confront all these people; perhaps smile and speak with them, as if nothing had happened.

Old Mr. and Mrs. St. Nicholas emerged from the opposite house, followed by Mrs. Monteith and her son. William St. Nicholas would doubtless follow. This thought brought the warm blood to her cheek. Was the church of St. Jerome, with its Gothic arches, stained windows, and ample chancel, sufficiently spacious to hold her, in her humbled pride and humiliated dignity, and William St. Nicholas? On Twelfth Night her gaze had questioned him, in the triumph of her departure from his sphere. What if his eyes now judged her, in turn? She sank down on a chair, with failing resolution.

"No, I cannot go," she said, with whitening lips.

Donald Belt made no comment, but continued to read his newspaper in the library, while Mrs. Belt and Aimée sought the church.

The moments passed, and Camilla still sat inert, struggling with her own weakness, and ashamed of her vacillation. The deep reverberations of the organ reached her inattentive ear, and the clear treble of the choristers. A longing to escape from the imprisonment of her own rooms began to oppress her.

"Let us go away," she said, seeking the presence of her father.

"Yes," he retorted, folding the newspaper. "I must make a journey to the West. A breath of prairie air will do you good."

"Has he sailed?" she pursued, hoarsely.

"Yes."

"Thank God!"

The Count Della Stella was once more a passenger on board the *Cristoforo Colombo*, and had quitted the shores which had proved so cruelly inhospitable to him. Once more he leaned against the bulwark, but it was to drop the photograph of Camilla Belt, long cherished, into the ocean wave. He had met a sphinx, and foiled, rejected, humiliated, had failed to solve the enigma of the inflexible pride of a Northern woman. Familiar with the feminine heart in every phase of light and shadow, the sudden petulance of jealousy, the delicious spites and tears, he remained baffled and defeated by the nature of the girl whose picture he had consigned to the sea, with the dejection of failure and the sting of wounded vanity.

Thus the steamship *Cristoforo Colombo* took her way back to the Mediterranean ports, bearer only of chagrin, disappointment, and vain regret.

CHAPTER XII.

WARP AND WOOF.

"A mighty web she wove,
Of double woof and brilliant hues; whereon
Was interwoven many a toilsome strife
Of Trojan warriors and of brass-clad Greeks
For her encountered at the hands of Mars."—"Iliad."

"WHAT will Camilla Belt do next?" queried Mrs. Monteith, on more than one occasion.

The town repeated the question, and hazarded many conjectures as to the result of the departure of Count Della Stella. In her sphere Camilla's opinions, movements, and preferences acquired value in proportion to her fortune. The heiress of ten millions must be turned, as a sweet morsel, between the lips of public criticism, when an obscure and dowerless girl would have been left undisturbed and unnoticed. The envious and the needy must lose themselves in a golden dream, handling, even in imagination, the wealth which belonged to another. The postponed wedding had certainly rendered more conspicuous the object of general interest, while each recurring week marked the issue of some fresh tale concerning Camilla. At one time she was pronounced engaged to Colonel Crosbie Ellery King, the gallant officer having caught her heart on the rebound. When rallied on the charge at the club the hero of many battles smiled complacently, and wisely refrained from self-defence. Again the navy gained precedence, in the person of dapper Captain Rawdon. Camilla was said to have plighted her troth to this brave navigator, and was to join him in China, whither he had been ordered, after a preliminary jaunt on camels in the Holy Land. Captain Rawdon became excited in manner when congratulated, on the strength of this rumor, and hastened to leave a card at the Belt mansion. We are ever ready to believe the report which suits our preferences and ambition.

Gossip next dealt kindly with the slender and pale assistant of St. Jerome's Church, the vision of whose ritualistic soul was said to be realized in the erection of a cathedral, by Miss Belt, where he would be installed, with a corps of attendant clergy, at the same date when she bestowed upon him her hand.

Professor Vincent Ashwell was announced to be on the wing from the West, Camilla having followed him as far as Chicago, in company with her father.

The pride of Donald Belt had suffered during the recent unexpected trial, but he betrayed no outward sign of annoyance, beyond contributing to certain charities with unusual liberality. His large form was to be seen in his accustomed haunts, and his intimate associates of the Meerschaum Club, solid men of family, were understood to be so far in his confidence as to opine Camilla was well out of a bad business in not marrying the count after all, a verdict carrying the weight of implying more than was imparted.

The course actually pursued by Camilla, on her return from the Western journey, was to thrust out of her sight, as far as possible, the pretty feminine luxuries with which it had previously been her pleasure to surround her existence, to attire herself with the most severe simplicity, to walk rather than drive, and to neither attend nor give those balls and amateur theatrical parties that had promised so much diversion in anticipation. She was suffering a reaction of mood. Her wealth was hateful to her, and she shrank from contemplation of it, wounded to the soul that mere riches should furnish her only claim to the consideration of her fellow-creatures. She was still drifting amidst unknown currents, with no secure footing possible in the shifting sands, and her present course, even accepted as a whim, was the passionate protest of a nature still sound against that canker of doubt and suspicion of the motives of every one which so speedily comes to the rich, often leading to bitterest scepticism of humanity. Camilla cherished in her memory the image of a pitiful manikin, whom she had foolishly designated as a man, of the name of the Count Della Stella. It was not his fault that he was only a manikin—a toy, broken at the first rude shock. The fault was her own in accepting him as other than a plaything, the leader of the cotillion, the bejewelled knight, in pasteboard cuirass, of a fancy ball.

Hangings, vases, and pictures were swept aside. She even rambled through the conservatory of chrysanthemums as if tempted to banish the yellow velvet of the Gloria-Mundi, the soft gold of the Martia, the superb ruby red of the Africaine, the mauve of the Duke of Teck, and the bronzed Comet, in favor of the bank of exquisite white Elaine, which imparted a snowy hue to the entire hothouse at night.

"Would you have only cacti, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Belt, in a peevish tone, for next to the contemplation of jewels she liked gorgeous flowers.

Camilla inspected the aviary without reply, and the metallic gloss

of sun-birds, cardinals, starlings, and paroquets, the perpetual mingling of scarlet, purple, emerald, and blue behind gilded bars was equally displeasing to her.

"Pray, leave the birds!" cried Mrs. Belt, once more. "Must we be reduced to the old gray parrot and some Java sparrows?"

Camilla frowned, and proceeded to unfold her plans to the bewildered Aimée, who had remained in Tulip Place during the recent journey of father and daughter. Camilla intended to mope no longer. Inaction was intolerable to her energetic temperament. She displayed, triumphantly, a diary, with a course of study and a distribution of hours as exemplary as the routine arranged, in his youth, by the late Prince Albert. Each day symphonies and duets were to be thoroughly mastered on twin pianofortes, and singing-lessons resumed with a favorite master. Plaster casts and drawing-materials, in another room, denoted an equal determination to excel in form, perspective, and coloring. A pile of ponderous volumes indicated a leaning towards a course of serious reading, while Mademoiselle Aimée was requested to resume the dialogues of Racine, Corneille, and Molière, suspended by the intrusion of the suitor from over the seas.

Camilla's eyes sparkled, her cheek flushed, and she compressed her lips with the firm resolution to achieve some work independent of her fortune. Her ambition to develop talent was marred by impatience, and a scorn of undue preliminary drudgery. Pent up and thwarted in one direction, the full current of life within her breast sought the outlet of some fresh channel.

Aimée watched her, doubtfully.

"Will the fever of industry last?" mused the little companion, whose own reveries were apt to be beguiling at this time, when she carried some fresh letter of Willy Monteith's concealed over her throbbing heart, for frequent and surreptitious perusal, hidden within the pages of Camilla's tomes.

"We might take up modelling in clay, Aimée," suggested the latter, one morning, surveying the sheet of paper before her with a half-suppressed yawn.

She was copying a plaster cast of Minerva, in crayon, and she transferred some of the dust from her blackened fingers to her nose, as she spoke.

"To model must be very difficult," demurred Aimée, glancing up with eyes wonderfully soft and tender from a volume of Bossuet, where the glowing words of Willy Monteith greeted her, within the printed page, with the caress the writer would fain have bestowed instead.

Confidences trembled on Aimée's lips, but she was chilled to silence by Camilla's unconscious attitude. A presence that makes the old

earth young again, with the unfolding growth of each succeeding generation, was hovering over Tulip Place on roseate wing. The boy-god was on mischievous errand intent, his aim the defiance of maternal care and worldly wisdom.

Camilla again yawned, and her crayon broke. The process of shading Minerva's helmet was tedious, not to say tamely conventional. Would it not be better to commence with living models at once—some bearded old man, rendered picturesque by means of tattered hat and cloak, or a sparkling brunette, decked out from Camilla's collection of peasant jewelry? Her glance wandered from the self-imposed task, as a child's attention strays in conning a lesson, to the columns of a weekly journal, where an advertisement attracted her eye. A needlework society offered a prize of two hundred and fifty dollars for the best specimen of embroidery submitted in competition, within a certain date.

Camilla smiled, and elevated her eyebrows. Was she not skilled, in a fitful fashion, in all manner of cunning designs with the needle? Minerva, the piano, and the serious works were abandoned in favor of canvas, silk, wools, and velvet. Patterns were discussed with Mrs. Belt and Mademoiselle Aimée, but Camilla shook her head. She must compose an original design.

At length she announced the inspiration had come to her. She had been turning the leaves of a rich missal, and paused at a quaint design of the Virgin Mary which pleased her fancy. Then she recklessly sacrificed a superb piece of antique gold brocade to her purpose, fitting the fabric, when shaped to moderate dimensions, in a frame, to work according to her own imagination. The brocade had once belonged to priestly vestments, and when Camilla purchased it of a Roman antiquarian she did not too closely question whether it had served in dismantled convent, or been stolen from the sacristy of some hill city, sacred to the memory of former popes.

It was on this rich background that her needle readily traced, taking the missal for guide, a slender and drooping Madonna, seated, and embroidering in turn, at a curious frame, a red lily. The flower being thus copied was placed in an upright vase at her side. A dove, wrought in silver thread, hovered above the bent head. The sacred emblems employed separated Camilla's labors from similar forms in Chinese and Japanese art, while the gorgeous tissue of the foundation atoned for any poverty of design. The task soothed and interested her. Now she was a true needlewoman, and might be drawing those rich threads to win her bread. How much money would be earned by the labor? To what use should her earnings be put? She plunged, in thought, into those vast hives of industry, the great emporiums of trade of all cities, and imagined she was

one of the human atoms of the mechanism, fabricating a design for the department of embroidery to undersell smaller dealers, and tempt fair ladies to palm off the purchased gift as their own work. Then she was the typical Song-of-the-Shirt seamstress, shivering in a cold garret, food and fire depending on the completed drudgery, cloth-of-gold and rainbow silks contrasting with squalid penury. This brain-picture proved too painful.

Camilla sighed, unconsciously, and with a fresh skein of blue threads took up a different train of reflections, more congenial to her own surroundings. She was the baron's daughter of feudal romance, dreaming in her turret chamber of the hero she would serve in the banquet-hall, her blonde tresses braided beneath a gilded net, and her satin robe bordered with fur. She was Queen Matilda, designing the Bayeux tapestries, in company with her ladies, stitching those fading outlines which have so long survived her. Thence the pleased fancy had ample scope in emulation of all those noble damsels whose skill with pencil and needle is supposed to have gratified their loyal subjects, serving as noble examples, whether in designing altar-piece of humble sanctuary on the shores of the Baltic Sea or contributing to modern art exhibition.

Camilla adhered to those broad effects of shading and outline deemed artistic in our day, rather than the fine elaboration of the time of our grandmothers.

How many old ladies smile to remember the linen cambric shirt, with the voluminous ruffles, made by their youthful fingers for a favorite brother, under the eye of the inexorable schoolmistress, as the crowning glory of industry of their ten years' span.

The labor accomplished, Camilla Belt took as many precautions as if she were despatching a valentine in sending the parcel to the society. Mademoiselle Aimée was intrusted with the delicate mission. The golden Madonna was marked with the number twenty-one and the letters C. B. She awaited the result with the curiosity and impatience of a novice.

Does the course of true love never run smoothly? Is not opportunity the flowery pathway frequently opened, in a dazzling vista of the possible and attainable, to lovers who would never have traced the route for themselves? Would little Aimée Rauvier have pursued her rash course had not Camilla sent her to haunt the bureau of needlework, and meet Willy Monteith on the way, for the exchange of the sweet mutual confidences which had become so necessary to the happiness of each?

The prize advertisement had set other hearts throbbing besides that of the girl in Tulip Place, striving to conquer herself by means of some wholesome employment. In the house number Twenty-

seven Elderberry Street, Brooklyn, whither William St. Nicholas had conducted the waifs of the Donohue family in safety, the matter was discussed, with animation, by Mrs. Hopper and her four grown daughters, and it was decided that Fanny should enter the lists, by reason of her superior skill, while her sisters honorably refrained from competition.

Mr. Abel Hopper, a tall and thin man of careworn aspect, with white beard and hair, was an agent for the sale of the Belt sewing-machine. Frederick Hopper, the only son, was a pale youth of good appearance, a clerk in an insurance office, with no prospect of promotion, and deemed fortunate to keep a situation at all amidst a throng of eager applicants. Frederick Hopper rejoiced in the reputation of being a dancing man, and as such certainly received more of the cakes and ale than did his sisters. His invitation to Camilla's flower ball had come as the waving of a distant sceptre, and through the instrumentality of a fashionable broker, acting as a sort of recruiting agent on such occasions. The hostess had not the slightest interest in the name of her guest, as associated with the invention of her grandfather, while serving, herself, as a beacon-light of unsurpassed and remote splendor to the entire Hopper household. Donald Belt had never come in direct contact with the agent, Abel Hopper, the invention which had served as a foundation-stone to his prosperity having been long since sold to a company.

The house on Elderberry Street was a cheerful centre of affection and hope. The mother was a warm-hearted, if hard-featured, matron, and known as a "stirring woman," with four pretty daughters to marry and settle. Sundry critical neighbors accused the Hopper ladies of being ever on the go, whether skurrying across the ferry in search of bargains at certain auction-rooms down-town, or traversing the widely expanding avenues and suburbs of their native city. To keep up appearances, and make both ends meet, required an exercise of all the energies of this active household. The young ladies trimmed their own bonnets, turned their gowns, made pies and gingerbread of rare excellence in an area kitchen, and with their own fair fingers swept and garnished the interior of home. In public they sang in the church choir, and taught in a mission-school of a Sunday afternoon; yet there could be no doubt Freddy had more than his share of the good things of life, and, petted by mother and sisters in addition, was in a fair way to become spoiled.

Romance glowed in the hearts of the Misses Hopper with an inextinguishable fervor. An occasional sociable came in their way, as daisies and buttercups bloom in every meadow-path, and the ex-

citing possibility of meeting one's fate on the ferry-boat was ever before their eyes, rendering them very careful as tc the number of buttons on their boots, and the suitable adjustment of coquettish little face-veils, as every right-minded young woman should be.

The prize conjured up glowing visions. Oh, if Fanny won it, not only would the money go far in the outlay of spring attire, but a field for future employment be secured, in a genteel craft adapted to women not sufficiently well educated for teachers, and too proud to serve in shops!

Frances Hopper set about the task with even more zeal than had characterized Camilla Belt, when the latter sacrificed the priest's vestment. In family conclave it was decided that Mrs. Hopper's wedding-dress must furnish the requisite materials, as a delicate silk of a soft ashes-of-roses tint. The matron demurred. The wedding-dress had done incredible service on august occasions, and might still be rendered useful for one of the girls. The artist in needle-work remained firm, while her sisters regarded her with a certain awe. Fanny was a blooming maiden of eighteen, dimpled, smiling, and altogether alluring, with coils of brown hair, and a white throat rendered still more fair by encircling velvet and locket. The color of the silk was adapted to her need. How was she to buy other materials just then? A small immolation of vanity must be made that much good might result. Mrs. Hopper thereupon yielded up the front breadth of the wedding-gown without further opposition. "A trimming of flounces might cover it up," she meditated, hopefully, with a view to a change of fashions.

Fanny, also, indulged in day-dreams over the embroidery frame. She was fancy free, save for several ephemeral flirtations with her partners at the sociables, yet she built an air-castle, as her needle flew, of the lover who would behold her in a costume of lilac wool, with roses in her fresh straw hat. This child of the nineteenth century was unable to determine whether she should meet her fate at church or on the ferry, but she was confident he would be established in a good business, and inclined to a safe maturity, either as bachelor or widower.

"I can have a brown-stone-front house, splendidly furnished, and he will take Fred into partnership," she soliloquized. "Pa shall have a new arm-chair."

Frances Hopper, true to the creed of her instruction, fashioned of her mother's wedding-gown a panel, and designed with her needle a scene on the soft-hued background, hints of clouds drifting low, a sun sinking behind hills, with spokes of rays piercing the vapor, and rippling water forming the foreground. Several birds, winging their flight in the left corner, suggested distance, and the New

Jersey coast, while a jaunty little boat rode the waves in gallant style. Here, again, the rigging of the craft and the brevity of the birds' legs alone saved the design from absolute imitation of a Japanese screen. Abel Hopper pronounced the birds to be snipe, and indulged in agreeable recollections of shooting on Long Island in earlier days. The result charmed the family critics of tender-hued silk—fraught with many memories, at least to the mistress of the house—and outlines obtained by means of sober shades of etching threads.

Fanny took the work herself, escorted by her adoring sisters, and proudly inscribed her name. If she won the prize the spring costume of lilac wool would be her own, and the future husband appear, attracted thereby, for he could not be expected to discern her from afar, clad in her old black jacket of many winters' wear. Thus reasoned the practical Frances.

Over on the west side of the city of New York, Mary Fox glanced at the sheet of paper in which the slice of cheese had been fetched for grandfather from the grocery, by Jem, and read the advertisement of the prize. She pored over the paragraph for a long time. A ray of hopeful light dawned in her clear eyes. Oh, if she could win it! The winning of the prize meant to her dragging the entire family forth from the slough of extreme poverty, into which it was sinking deeper and deeper with the lapse of years. The winning of the prize meant to her the respite of breathing space requisite to begin the world over again, to take the fresh start which also signifies a renewal of courage.

The sphere of Mary Fox was a narrow one, hampered by many difficulties, with small scope for the exercise of noble qualities of courage and enterprise, in the ceaseless drudgery of petty routine, and even a cheerful spirit chilled and thwarted by contemplation of the household grievance. The grievance was the sale of some land and a dilapidated little house to shrewd Joseph Belt, once upon a time.

Grandfather, seated at the corner of the stove, bent, shrivelled, and querulous, but in possession of all his faculties, had married the heiress of that memorable bargain, a jaunty bridegroom, some fifteen years her junior, and had grumbled over the transaction ever since. Grandfather had been difficult to suit in the matter of useful employment in his day, and various masters had failed to afford him satisfaction, until it had come to be clearly understood that he was old, and his son's children ministered henceforth to his wants, while he glowered at the buildings rising on the Belt property opposite his own shabby and overcrowded dwelling. The old man was exacting as to his little comforts, and, if denied them for a space,

did not hesitate to run in debt to neighboring tradespeople for snuff, tea, or a pipe. David Fox, with the retreating and insufficient brow, furtive eye, and heavy chin, would never have achieved the work of keen, patient, and courageous Joseph Belt, but his resentment was none the less sombre and malevolent, for that reason, and he laid the grievous burden of it upon his weak and vacillating descendants, until Charles Fox became more shambling and discouraged in bearing, as well as less steady at work, frequenting bar-rooms to keep up his courage, Margaret Fox sought refuge in the quiet grave, and even the boys began to look sulky over their common, albeit but vaguely understood, wrongs, especially when hunger pinched them.

The heaviest burden of care had fallen on the only girl and eldest child, Mary. If not wholly crushed by the influence of the grandfather's pessimism, it was because she had no leisure to think of herself and analyze her emotions. Since her twelfth year, when the mother died, Mary had served as housekeeper and nurse to the young brothers, and tended the grandfather. Her equanimity passed for mere stupidity with David Fox. She had picked up such crumbs of education as she possessed as best she could, being denied school by reason of the clamorous requirements of the domestic circle.

A girl of good natural abilities, Mary had early discerned many fields of employment where she could have excelled in time. From cash-girl to bookkeeper, her mind covered the entire range of feminine industries, intuitively divining her own capacity for such situations by means of that very instinct of industry lacked by her family.

> "Working for a living?
> May no worse befall!
> Love is always busy,
> God works over all."

If there is work that stimulates and arouses the noblest powers of the worker, so there is fruitless toil, a strain on feeble nerves, and a weight on sinking hearts. Such was the portion of this girl.

At twenty-one Mary Fox sat at her sewing-machine, hollow-cheeked, careworn, held back by the fretful exactions on her time, broken in spirit by the family discontent, and wearied with the perpetual railing at fate, that poverty brooded over the Fox hearthstone, while opulence was the Belt portion.

The machine had been purchased only at great personal sacrifice, by means of pennies saved from grandfather's snuff, the occasional five dollars eliminated from Charles Fox's wages, when an industrious fit was upon him, the proceeds of such scanty earnings as she could command. She was the only girl, the mother was dead, and

a woman was needed in the house. Something more than the sting of envy at the Belt prosperity stirred in her breast, in the longing to escape and work at her best.

Grandfather did not object to the whirring hum of the machine-wheel, in the window, while his eyes were too dim to decipher the name of Belt engraved on the steel plate.

Such was the lot on which the prize competition dawned, like a ray of sunshine penetrating a dark chamber. That day Mary took back some work which a dressmaker had given her. Color warmed her resolute face, and brightness dawned in her eyes. Many articles were needed at home, yet, with the rashness of a speculator, she staked her money on the purchase of the materials needful for her purpose, and withdrew to the corner behind the sewing-machine to mature her plan. The men would not notice her occupation, while she could secure the necessary leisure by stating that it was a task she must finish as quickly as possible. Already this very labor was involving her in a mesh of fresh difficulty. The grandfather demanded toll out of the dressmaker's payment, one of the boys wished to borrow a few shillings, and she had prevaricated, stating she had not been paid. Grandfather blustered, the boys stared, and Mary took refuge in her corner.

The happiest period of this girl's life was the time devoted to making the needlework design for the competitive exhibition. She did not dare to reflect on the plush cushions, the screens, the fans, which would assuredly be found in company with her own modest offering. She could only hope the merit of her labor would rival the others, and gradually this prayer gave her confidence in the result. Perhaps it was her destiny to succeed. Her heart gained lightness and expansion, as she wrought, and she crooned a song, too low for grandfather's ear.

Do you imagine Mary Fox had no reveries, no air-castles, over the task, because she was friendless, had never received the smile of a lover, and dwelt on the third story of a shabby brick house, with a peevish old man seated beside the fire? A learned author has stated that all descriptions of the instincts and sufferings of the poor by a superior class are the results of false sentimentality, ignorant of the actual person delineated. This affirmation may apply to the peasant class of Europe, but cannot serve for a measurement of American character.

Mary Fox possessed as fine susceptibilities, and, perhaps, far more noble instincts than those daughters of Tulip Place, Mrs. Monteith and Camilla Belt. Given the same advantages, she would have held ground with either of them. As it was, her dreams were of her sphere. The prize won, she would get more employment through

the same channel, and ease might result. She permitted herself a long holiday, such as she had never known, all her senses washed pure of the town, on the brink of ocean, or amidst the grass and trees of the country. She bought, in sheer folly of wanton extravagance, a tiny glass fernery, a tropical world of mystery, to unfold on the table. She had no lover, and yet the thought mingled pleasantly with her musings that the gentleman who came so often to the home of the German music-master opposite should smile on her, as well.

The gentleman was William St. Nicholas. Her glance strayed to the piano manufactory over the way, erected on the Belt property, and her pride took fire. She had a secret, a puzzle, which had lurked in her brain for years. If one might meet the memory of cruel, exacting old Joseph Belt on the equality of another invention!

Her fingers shredded out the bordering fringes of the Bolton sheeting, and marked a cunning mosaic-work of colored silks in the corners of the table-cover, and thence wove a garland of autumn leaves—such as glorify even city squares in their season—russet, scarlet, and orange, around the margin.

Throbbing head and fevered cheek, aching nerves and trembling hands, contributed their aid to complete the task, until the girl was enabled to carry her bundle to the office, already visited by Mademoiselle Aimée and the Misses Hopper.

One day Aimée entered the presence of Camilla, with sparkling eyes, and the announcement that the golden Madonna had won the prize. Concealment of identity being no longer desirable, the statement that Miss Belt was as clever with her needle as she was highly accomplished in the arts was inserted in several fashionable journals, to stimulate the industry of other ladies to active emulation.

Camilla was delighted. She held in her hand tightly the money she had earned, fearing it might melt away, like fairy gold. For the first time she found the flattery of public opinion agreeable, because it was merited. Her ability, and not her wealth, had gained her commendation. Subtile distinction of human vanity! She moved about in tranquil humor, marvelling how she should spend the prize-money. Donald Belt was gratified as well, and rallied his daughter on her stock of talents, whereby she could maintain herself should the wheel of fortune turn—as rich men, secure in their own fortune, are fond of doing. Mrs. Belt was puzzled, with the slightest possible shade of scorn perceptible on her delicate features.

The incident afforded Mrs. Monteith an opening for the renewal of intimate intercourse, which she had awaited with concealed eagerness. She could not intrude on Camilla's seclusion, but surely she might hasten to express her admiration of the pre-Raphaelite

Madonna, and resume association, veiling deeper currents beneath harmless and interminable feminine discussion of embroidery.

The tidings of disaster were received at number Twenty-seven Elderberry Street, Brooklyn, with sobs and lamentations, where Fanny Hopper leaned her pretty head on the table and yielded to tears. Anger and woe rankled in the feminine breast. Of course everybody could not gain the prize, in reason, but that Camilla Belt should have proved victor added the drop of gall to the cup of bitterness.

"I should think she had about enough now," was the gloomy comment of Mrs. Hopper, who had so recklessly burned her ships, in the matter of sacrificing the front breadth of her wedding-gown.

Fanny raised her flushed face, and clinched her hand.

"I call it downright wicked of Miss Belt to take bread out of the mouth of poor girls like that!" she exclaimed, fiercely.

Mrs. Hopper sighed, and a wrinkle marred her forehead. Business was dull, and the butcher's account weighed on her spirits; two circumstances that led a naturally liberal-minded woman to judge the conduct of Camilla with rancorous severity.

"I wish she might ever know what it is to need two hundred and fifty dollars," remarked the matron. "She never will, though. That sort always go in a coach and pair for the rest of their days."

Fanny drew her breath hard, and set her little white teeth.

"I call it wicked!" she reiterated.

If there were sobs of disappointment in the cheerful home on Elderberry Street, there was despair, mute, pallid, and still, in the poor room of the brick house near the Hudson River. Mary Fox ate no supper, but sat with her hands folded in her lap.

"Look here, I haven't got another cent," announced Charles Fox, hoarsely, with spirit-tainted breath and watery eyes. "When's that dressmaker going to pay up?"

"To-morrow," replied the daughter, mechanically.

On the morrow the Belt sewing-machine went to the pawnbroker. Mary Fox walked beside the cart of the friendly ragman, who carried it for her concealed among his bags. Her face was pale, and her head bent, as if she were following a funeral. Is not the pawnbroker's shop the grave of Hope?

"Who knows the ways of the world, how God will bring them about?"

CHAPTER XIII.

NETTLES.

"There are nettles everywhere,
But smooth green grasses are more common still;
The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud."—MRS. BROWNING.

"MISS BELT, I believe you do not approve of the programme."

"Oh, yes, Mr. St. Nicholas, it is a good programme."

He made a little gesture, swiftly and unconsciously, enjoining silence. She was astonished, even piqued. The music was about to recommence, and Mendelssohn was better worth hearing than her conversation. She scanned the man at her side, for a moment, then drooped in an attitude of languid indifference. At least he was honest. Never before had Camilla been set aside for music.

The concert was given under the direction of a society of which William St. Nicholas was a member, and the famous Steinbach had graciously promised to sing. Mrs. Monteith had invited Camilla to accompany her, and when her brother conducted the ladies to seats a place was reserved for him by his affectionate sister.

"Do sit here, Willy," urged Mrs. Monteith, and speedily launched into lively debate with a party of friends beyond, on the respective merits of two rival singers.

The overture ceased, and William St. Nicholas turned again to Camilla, once more aware of her propinquity.

"Does that please you?" he inquired, with a long inspiration of contentment.

"No," she retorted, curtly, with a wilful movement of her chin.

He looked at her calmly.

"Ah!" he rejoined, gravely and incredulously.

Camilla failed to lure him into open conflict; he declined to pick up the gauntlet which she had flung down in a spirit of perversity.

"I do not care for the programme. It is unnecessarily tedious and dull. You must be shocked by my obtuseness, Mr. St. Nicholas. People do not often dare to confess how dreadfully concerts bore them. They sit through interminable symphonies, like solemn owls, without venturing to assert that their souls are their own," exclaimed Camilla, with provoking malice.

"You dare, it seems," he rejoined, adjusting the opera-glass to sweep the stage, where a dazzling vision had just appeared, greeted by a ripple of applause from the audience.

A woman stood there, surrounded by coils of undulating green draperies, her hair of palest gold, crowned by emeralds, in form of tremulous rushes; her whim the triumph of posing before entranced multitudes as a Lurlei-maid, harp in hand. Encircled by the nimbus of reputation as a successful *artiste*, and seen through the medium of stage lights, she seemed a being set apart from the touch of time and misfortune. The old story of power, remote as the day of the Empress Theodora, in her youth of the circus, was repeated for transatlantic ears in favor of the Steinbach. Had not a great composer embraced her with tears, after the fall of the curtain, transported by her dramatic interpretation of his *chef d'œuvre?* Was she not detained in music-loving Russia beyond all precedent, and overwhelmed with jewels, rivalling Golconda? Had not Paris, even, been moved to praise, despite her Teutonic origin, while the London season was deemed incomplete without her?

Camilla was aroused to interest. The Steinbach had rendered Wagner as Elsa and the Niebelungen spirits were never before sung for American audiences, during the present winter and past spring.

"He knows the prima donna," thought Camilla, observing William St. Nicholas with a certain element of curiosity.

Yes, the musical amateur knew the siren in the green robe, and his pulses throbbed a trifle more quickly for her appearance there, and in anticipation of the silvery tones of a voice so suave, magnetic, and rich that it drew the soul of the listener away from all other ties to a different atmosphere, a realm of emotion remotely suggestive, evanescent, exquisite in the very cadence of unavailing sadness and regret.

William St. Nicholas, forced to listen to his sister's prattle concerning Camilla Belt, and disapproving of the latter as much as ever, had not found it unpleasant to be seated beside her at the concert, until the Steinbach appeared, and then he wished to be alone; above all, that the object of his disdain were not there. In his heart he disdained Camilla, not more for the failure of the wedding ceremony than for her choice of the Count Della Stella as a husband. He tried her and found her sadly wanting, in his own thought, with additional severity that all the other women admired the foreign nobleman as well. She was a flower too boldly scanned, and thrown aside.

Her courage and calmness in attending the concert surprised him a little, and perhaps she gained his respect for the haughty coldness of her bearing. She should have hidden in a miserable obscurity,

yet she carried herself well on the whole, and he relented so far as to approve of her recent employment in embroidering the golden Madonna, and winning a prize. Still, he was wary and suspicious to the extent of not being easily propitiated, and he divined sisterly scheming in the attitude of Mrs. Monteith, and an ultimate intention of drawing Camilla and himself together and establishing a mutual liking, such as might readily result. He was very tender with his sister, but his will was firm. Successor of the Count Della Stella! The very suggestion brought a dark flush of anger to his brow. That would be playing second, indeed!

He raised his glass and scrutinized Steinbach, with mingled attraction and repulsion. The matchless singer, the beguiling coquette, the clever actress and woman, had cast her spell upon him, as she invariably did on all who came within the circle of her charms, but the influence had waned with her absence, and he had recovered his usual sober mood. To-night he experienced a reckless impulse to court the danger anew. Why not? He was free. As well drain the Circe cup of fascination proffered by the *diva* as leave it for another.

The Steinbach, guided by a few chords of the orchestra, began to sing, and all other sound was hushed. The clear notes of her voice gushed forth in unrestrained volume, then sprinkled the vast hall, as it were, with pearly trills and roulades, and changing by subtile modulations to a minor key, full of passionate suggestiveness, acquired a weird cadence and paused abruptly, leaving the listening ear startled, perplexed, yet longing for more. The song was as strangely enigmatical as the singer, and the voice was a Northern voice, lacking the melting warmth of the South, as it acquired something spiritual in comparison.

The audience acknowledged the magnetism of both by recalling her. She smiled, and her bearing changed. In a moment she was the petted favorite of the public — capricious, petulant, and arch. She put her finger on her lip, with the charming grace of taking the audience into her confidence and sharing a secret, then seated herself at a pianoforte, running her fingers lightly over the keys. Then she warbled forth a little melody, giving the English words of a familiar triolet, with a pretty accent:

"When first we met we did not guess
That Love would prove so hard a master;
Of more than common friendliness
When first we met we did not guess.
Who could foretell this sore distress,
This irretrievable disaster,
When first we met? We did not guess
That Love would prove so hard a master."

As she sang, dwelling on each turn with delicate and roguish emphasis, the actress looked at William St. Nicholas, and all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Does the singing bore you, Miss Belt?" he inquired, replacing the glass in the case.

"The singing pleases me better than the singer," retorted Camilla.

Why was she moved to speak thus? She never knew.

"Excuse me a moment." He quitted the seat, made his way to the stage, and led the cantatrice away, amidst renewed applause.

"She sang Willy's song to flatter us all, of course. Odious creature!" said Mrs. Monteith.

"Do you mean that your brother set those words to music, and Steinbach selected the song for an *encore?*" demanded Camilla.

She felt a strange contraction of the heart. The words of the ballad still chimed in her brain wearily and monotonously, as the motion of the railway train keeps pace with the meditations of the traveller. "When first we met we did not guess." What did it signify that William St. Nicholas had left her, to lead the prima donna from the stage?

"I may have expressed my fears as to where his musical proclivities may lead him," continued Mrs. Monteith, in a tone of unfeigned dissatisfaction. "Ah, Miss Belt, be thankful you have no brother to watch over, with so many artful women setting traps for him, and trying to circumvent you at every turn."

"So many?" queried Camilla, doubtfully.

"I tremble to think of Willy's falling into the clutches of this *diva,*" added Mrs. Monteith, in a confidential undertone. "She sang that song to make him lead her off the stage, of course. I wonder what she finds to say to him in the waiting-room."

What the Steinbach was saying to William St. Nicholas at the time, with a strange light in her blue eyes, was,

"So you have not forgotten me?"

"I have to thank you for the honor you have done me in singing my poor little song," he replied.

She again gave him her hand, with that royal air which she could not readily put aside in private life.

"I have been to Brazil and Mexico and Cuba. I find the song waiting to welcome my return," she said, in her softest accents. "Come and sup with me at eleven to-morrow night. They have decked me with jewels, like a barbarian queen *là bas,* and given me parrots and monkeys."

He bowed, half unwillingly, and gazed into the blue eyes. Why should he not go? Was he the slave of any other woman's caprice? Resentment spurred disinclination.

What the Steinbach thought in that brain of hers—at once frivolous, shallow, and terribly worldly wise in all cunning—where she stored every item of town gossip, was:

"There was one in the audience not of my world, a girl with straight eyebrows and a high nose, who can buy the respect of all, for she holds a fortune such as we queens of song seldom reap. The American was beside her. It would be something to boast of in my old age that I took him away."

What the Steinbach did was to detain him, with coaxing and imperious words and gestures, holding her favorite poodle, exchanging cards with the Norwegian violinist, just arrived, cloaking and conducting her to her carriage, in preference to any other cavalier, until the orchestra had crashed through a final brilliant fantasia, and Mrs. Monteith had accepted the services of a friend to find her carriage.

"We cannot expect a musician to keep his head for all the emergencies of life," said the sister, with outward amiability and secret rage. "William is perfectly wild about that Norwegian violinist."

Camilla Belt laughed, and slowly gathered up her draperies. Mrs. Monteith observed her anxiously, but her brow remained unclouded. Had she not just won a needlework prize, the gilded ball suspended on the highest branch of the Christmas-tree of similar gifts. The night was chill, and Camilla felt it through her furs. A frozen rain was falling, rendering the pavement glassy.

"Is that Miss Belt?" The voice was low, yet it reached her ear, as she placed her foot on the carriage step.

Camilla turned her head. A girl, wrapped in a faded shawl, stood near the curbstone, and a pale, shadowy face, with glittering eyes, looked at her out of the darkness. A boy was endeavoring to draw her away, plucking at her gown, whimperingly.

"Is that Miss Belt," the thin voice repeated.

The words must have been an echo, for the speaker was gone before Camilla had seated herself in the carriage. She was accustomed to a certain amount of public curiosity, yet the pale face and glittering eyes rose again before her with a sort of menace, and sent a thrill through her veins.

William St. Nicholas hastened to join the ladies, with apologies for his delay, which were received sweetly by his sister and nonchalantly by Camilla.

"We forgive you, my dear," said the former. "I knew the Norwegian violinist would entrance you."

"Of course you have heard Poniowsky," said Camilla, with a movement of her gloved hand suggestive of concealing a yawn.

"I found Steinbach delicious," pursued Mrs. Monteith, smoothly.

"I could detect no evidence of her voice being worn, and she is certainly still a fine-looking woman."

"Why should her voice be worn?" demanded William St. Nicholas, a trifle dryly.

"She must be incredibly old," said Mrs. Monteith, as if pursuing her own train of reflections. "These singers only come to us as wisps of debutantes, or when they have exhausted the European market. Papa's friend, Mr. White, declares he was in love with Steinbach twenty years ago, when he was a Leipsic student."

William St. Nicholas made no reply. He sat opposite Camilla Belt, with his whole soul in revolt against her presence there, and further irritated by his sister's criticism. Had Mr. White admired the Steinbach twenty years before in Germany? Was her beautiful voice the least shade worn? He resented having the billows of Camilla's satin dress envelop him, and the perfume exhaled by her fan displeased his senses, while she leaned back in the most remote corner of the vehicle. Light and shadow from objects passed chased each other swiftly across the carriage, whose occupants wore a mask of conventional restraint, rather than of unrestrained gayety.

Said the Abbé Fénélon:

> "We may be near to each other and not meet,
> And far apart in the same room."

Mrs. Monteith prattled on, artlessly, about Steinbach. Why should she not discuss the singer of the evening? She wondered if the *diva* would die singing, like Malibran. She indulged in conjectures as to whether she took the yolk of eggs and sugar to preserve her vocal ligaments from hoarseness, or ate two salted cucumbers to obtain a metallic clearness of tone, after the method of the Swedish tenor Labath, or preferred snuff and lemonade. She was conscious of some change in Camilla. The easy patronage which might have once served to lead her with a silken thread was no longer possible.

"She is beginning to feel her own power," thought the daughter of the house of St. Nicholas. "She has the right. The plainer her origin the more likely she will be to assert her ten millions. Ah, money does everything in these days. What blundering creatures men are."

Each was relieved when the moment of separation came.

Mrs. Monteith did not pour the vials of her wrath on her brother's head when left alone with him. Perhaps she feared to launch into speech. She shot one little arrow of sarcasm at him at the door.

"Wonders will never cease, Willy! You have made Camilla Belt play second fiddle to a pack of low musicians to-night."

"You should not have invited her," he retorted, sharply. "She cares nothing about music."

He plunged into meditations on the step he had taken in accepting the invitation of a siren to sup with her on the following evening. The face of Steinbach gazed up at him from a sheet of music on the table, with her veiled glance. His own features became sombre, cynical, wrathful. Some strange and inexplicable discontent troubled him. In sheer disgust at the feeble and flimsy elements of his own sphere he determined to henceforth devote himself more closely to his favorite study. The priestess of this temple of music was the singer who had invited his worship with bewitching coquetry. He accepted the challenge, from which he had shrunk the previous year, with eagerness, exultation, and defiance of the judgment of Tulip Place. Let the consequences be what they might, he would attend the supper-party. He resumed the composition of his operetta.

The following morning Camilla Belt received two letters by the post. She examined the writing, in either case unfamiliar, then opened, and read the contents, with a face expressive of surprise and annoyance. The first missive, in pretty, feminine characters, ran thus:

"MISS BELT,—You have everything heart can wish for, and yet you take the bread out of the mouths of poor girls by competing with their work. May the prize of two hundred and fifty dollars swell your wealth as the ugly gold Madonna has your vanity."

Camilla's eyes flashed, and she crushed the paper in her hand.

"What impertinence!" she exclaimed.

It was her first experience of an anonymous communication. She was astonished, even enraged, that the mail could have brought this winged shaft to her door.

The second note was addressed on coarser paper, in a less firm and legible hand. The pen had trembled in the grasp of unsteady fingers, the sheet was marred by several blots and erasures. Camilla read:

"MISS BELT,—Can wrong always rule? Oh, if you knew all, would you care? No, you will not care! You are very far away. Why should you? I am in debt for the table-cover, and must go to the pawnbroker's. You did not know there was such a man, did you? The prize-money can bring you no luck, as God is just."

Camilla uttered a cry, and threw the second letter across the room.

"I will not stand such things," she exclaimed, and stamped her foot on the floor.

Aimée placed the two letters on a card-dish.

Indignation transported the high-spirited Camilla. What! Her golden Madonna was pronounced ugly by one rival, who took ref-

uge in an anonymous sneer, and unjust by another. She had wronged these unknown and envious ones by excelling them. The first effusion was evidently the petulance of disappointment; the second an appeal for charity, no doubt. Camilla steeled her heart against both. She was not to be moved in that way. She put the matter aside, as a thorn-prick, unworthy of her notice, and therefore to be dismissed with lofty magnanimity. These two correspondents would gain nothing.

She returned to art, pushing aside the wools and embroidery in turn. She performed a duet on the two pianos with Aimée, and remembered afterwards that the skilful fingers of her companion did not trip through scale and chord as nimbly as usual, while she evinced a disposition to lag in the matter of time-keeping. Next, she resumed the task of shading Minerva's helmet in the study of the plaster cast, working with commendable perseverance and in absolute silence. At the expiration of two hours she rose suddenly, had herself attired for the street, and said to Aimée,

"Come!"

They walked to the office of the needlework exhibition. Camilla inquired if the other articles still remained, and was informed that they had been left on sale by the disappointed contestants for the prize. She examined each specimen, as if intent on criticising design and execution. She was striving to wrest from plush, canvas, and silk the secret of her two letters, after her own fashion. The articles had been numbered in the office, while the registry of names in the ledger afforded no clew to the identity of her correspondents. She had wronged the patient fingers that had wrought all this work. She had crushed the spirit of the workers by the intrusion of her old-gold brocade, splendor tending to render shabby the other fabrics. If her conscience was stung and her heart moved, her face remained stern and resolute.

"I will take them all," she said, at length, and had the price of two hundred and fifty dollars affixed to each article.

There was a little stir through the showrooms as Camilla wrote a check for the requisite amount.

"I wish them all, mind!" she stipulated.

"Very well, Miss Belt," said the manager.

Returning home, she embraced little Aimée.

"*Voilà!* Now our consciences are at rest," she said, with restored good-humor.

Aimée bowed her head, and yielded to sudden tears. She had no reason to give for such weakness and despondency. Her dreams had been bad the previous night. The little hypocrite feared the Aunt Marthe might be ill. Camilla was so good to her! Yes, too good.

That night William St. Nicholas returned home at ten o'clock, having dined at a club with the Norwegian violinist. His mood was easy and gay, as he made those changes of toilet indispensable to supping with a siren. He had entered the house by means of his latch-key, without seeking his mother to bid her good-night. At half-past ten he departed again, with equal stealthiness. Why should he bid his mother good-night?

As he closed the door a man approached him. The man was bareheaded, and proved to be one of the Belt servants. The messenger was about to ring the bell.

"It's from Miss Belt, sir," he explained.

Mr. St. Nicholas took the visiting-card, on which Camilla had written these words in pencil:

"Come to me immediately, and do not tell your sister."

The recipient read the line by the light of the street-lamp, and involuntarily uttered a subdued whistle of surprise. What could Camilla Belt wish with him? He consulted his watch, turned the card irresolutely between his fingers, and reflected a moment.

"Does Miss Belt require to see me to-night?"

"If you please, sir."

He followed the servant without further opposition. Perhaps he was dimly conscious that a crisis in his life had come, detaining him in Tulip Place when his errant footsteps were about to carry him far from the familiar locality.

The siren sat at her supper-table, spread with flowers and fruit, awaiting the favored guest who did not come. Her yellow tresses were braided with pearls, soft laces enveloped her shoulders and arms, a rose nestled in her corsage. Laughter and wit animated the company, champagne sparkled in brimming glasses, but William St. Nicholas was not of the number.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PAIR OF TURTLE-DOVES.

"*A simple maiden in her flower*
Is worth a hundred coat-of-arms."
"Lady Clara Vere de Vere."

William St. Nicholas wondered what unusual event had occurred to make Camilla Belt send for him at half-past ten o'clock at night, with that sly additional hint about not telling his sister. Coquetry might lead some girls to take the measure, but he could not flatter himself Camilla was likely to extend such an overture to him, of all men.

He followed the messenger in silence. Donald Belt did not greet him on the threshold with his customary ponderous hospitality. Mrs. Belt's delicate face was not visible, brought into fine relief by the rich hangings of some *portière.* The interior of the house was well lighted, warm, and very still. The servant explained that master and mistress were absent at a dinner-party and reception.

The spaniel, Turco, inspected the visitor gravely from the door-mat, and wagged his tail.

Camilla advanced to meet him, her brow contracted, and her manner preoccupied. She inclined her head slightly, and apparently forgot to offer him her hand—a circumstance which fully restored his own equanimity. She was in trouble of some sort, and looked to him for aid.

William St. Nicholas always remembered Camilla's appearance that night. She wore a gray dress, fastened with steel buttons, and a linen collar. Her chestnut hair was coiled in a knot at the back of her head, and curled low over her forehead, imparting a harmonious outline to her features. He noticed with satisfaction that her hands were devoid of rings, while the solitaire diamonds, so much resembling glass in their purity, no longer sparkled in her ears. He preferred the gray robe to the sunflower costume.

Camilla led the way to the small blue room, glanced about cautiously, and closed the door. Then she approached her visitor, and said,

"I sent for you. That was my first thought."

He extended his hand, and took her fingers in a warm and soft clasp. His face glowed.

"I am glad you sent for me—to-night."

Camilla scrutinized him with grave attention, and gently withdrew her hand.

"You are glad I sent for you to-night?" she repeated, slowly.

The echo of his own words displeased him.

"Consider me at your service, Miss Belt."

"At my service!" she retorted, opening her eyes with a gleam of amusement. "I fear I count for little in the whole affair. They are gone. They have flown away like a pair of turtle-doves. Ah, what fools they are! One must scold a little, still one cannot help laughing."

"They? Who?" he questioned, with a sudden suspicion dawning on his mind for the first time.

"Your nephew and Mademoiselle Aimée Rauvier. She went out to pay a visit this afternoon, and told me she might stay to dinner. The wicked Russ! I dined alone in consequence. Oh, you need not pity me, I rather liked it. At eight o'clock I sent over to the house of Aimée's friend, and, behold! she had not been there. I was frightened about the child, for she never quite liked our independent ways of walking alone. There seemed to be nothing to do but to wait. Only a few moments ago this wretched little note jumped at my very eyes, in moving a book. It had been there on the table for hours, I suppose, without my noticing it."

She tendered the letter to him, adding, with a smile,

"Pray take the arm-chair, Mr. St. Nicholas. The reading of it may be too much for you."

He complied, and Camilla drew up a second chair, waiting until he should have finished the perusal before again speaking.

Aimée's epistle was composed in English, and interspersed with all manner of little French exclamations of hope and despair. They had been married by the Baptist minister on the Tenth Avenue, and gone away together in the American manner. They were very young, and the step taken was rash, wicked, most imprudent, only they loved each other. Such was the refrain of the letter—they loved each other. The phrase recurred in every fresh appeal for forgiveness, with pathos, ingenious reiteration, and a certain defiance of irrepressible joyfulness. They had loved one another since the ball, when Willy Monteith had begged a flower of the Edelweiss maiden. They were willing to work, if they need not be separated, and they were so happy!

All this, and much more, which had moved Camilla to a certain wondering and wistful sympathy, did not move William St. Nicho-

las in the least. His face acquired unwonted gravity as he folded and returned the note without immediate comment.

The dog Turco sat between them, turning his head from side to side, with a comical expression of canine wisdom, to glance at one and the other.

"I suppose a boy like Willy must be expected to fall in love sooner or later," he said, at length. "I wish it had been anything else, though."

"Perhaps you would prefer an entanglement with some actress to marriage with little Aimée," flashed out the defender of the bride.

William St. Nicholas colored slightly.

"This elopement will break his mother's heart," he said, stiffly, and weighing in his hand an enclosed envelope, addressed to Mrs. Monteith, in her son's familiar writing.

"Ah! I sent for you to inform her," resumed Camilla, speaking with a nervous rapidity that betrayed her concern. "You will know how to manage. You must not permit her to think ill of little Aimée, though."

"I fear every one will think very ill of Mademoiselle Rauvier," he rejoined, with unnecessary severity.

"As you do," she supplemented, quickly.

"As I do," he assented. "The Edelweiss maiden, in spite of her protestations to the contrary, seems to have kept her head, in this emergency."

"Of course you believe she inveigled your nephew into a marriage," said Camilla, indignantly.

"Her most serious fault has been not taking so kind and generous a mistress into her confidence," he said.

Camilla was silent a moment, and bit her lip.

"Perhaps little Aimée would have spoken if I had given her a chance," she said, sudden passion kindling in her eyes. "I have taken no notice of her of late. I have been cheating myself with shadows, and catching at straws. Do you know what I have done, Mr. St. Nicholas? Won a prize, and raised a wail of woe from my sisters of the town. What is right, I wonder? To obliterate one's self, perhaps."

The dog rose, as if in protest to the sentiment, whined, placed his fore-paws on her knees, and looked up into her face. She took Turco's head between her palms, and smiled.

"I always believe in you, Turco," she said.

William St. Nicholas regarded her with interest. Camilla Belt expressing confidence in the fidelity of a dog, as if setting aside humanity, seemed to him unique, and worthy of speculation. He forgot the siren, seated at her supper-table, a bewildering vision of yel-

low hair, heavy-lidded eyes, pearls and laces, the smoke of a cigarette escaping from her lips, in the little blue-room of the Belt mansion, which was cold and conventional in comparison with the luxurious disorder of the *diva's* surroundings. The crystal chandelier shed a ray on the azure hangings which was frosty in its gleam, and thence on Camilla, in her gray dress, with the linen collar. This interior, deemed ostentatious by a fastidious disapproval on a previous occasion, gained dignity in his eyes, deserted save by this central figure, the daughter of the house.

"You are fond of your dog, Miss Belt," he said, with a smile.

"Turco has saved life," she rejoined. "If we should fall into stormy waters he would save us. Would you not, Turco?"

Thus addressed, the spaniel quitted his mistress, walked over to William St. Nicholas, and began to lick that gentleman's hands with exuberant affection.

"How odd!" mused Camilla. "He does not like strangers, usually. Come back to your mistress, sir."

"Perhaps he does not consider me as a stranger," suggested the visitor. "I am fond of animals. They always know when you believe in them."

Camilla regarded him in turn, noting that he had

> "Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
> High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
> Large, fair, and fine."

"Turco may have some difficulty in rescuing us from the troubled waters of our present dilemma," she resumed, recalling him to their common subject of interest. "What is to be done?"

They discussed the circumstances of the elopement, and of the newly wedded pair having gone to Philadelphia, until the clock struck a silvery chime of midnight. William St. Nicholas had once more leaned back in his arm-chair, and looked at Camilla. Irresolution was expressed by his gestures, while his face became animated, and his eyes acquired a new brilliancy. The sudden change in his demeanor troubled Camilla. She recalled, with unnecessary warmth of remorse, her ungracious bearing at the concert. Why had her temper been so perverse? She had been absolutely rude about the selection of music. He must have deemed her without a soul at all.

"So they fell in love with each other at the flower ball," he repeated, reverting to Willy and Aimée.

"Yes," assented Camilla. "Aimée is a lady, and a very good girl. The Aunt Marthe educated her as few of our girls are educated. Your sister will have every reason to be proud of her pretty daughter-in-law."

He was following another train of reflection.

"We did not keep step very well, I remember," he said, ignoring the commendation of the bride. "What an awkward dancer you must have found me, and cross, besides. I cannot imagine why Strauss went better—"

Camilla rose, to check his words.

"Let us score off your ill-humor at the ball against mine of the concert, then. We are birthday comrades, are we not?"

Allusion to the ball wounded her. She regarded him steadily, and the light died slowly out of his face.

"I need not detain you longer, Mr. St. Nicholas. You pardon my sending for you?" she continued, and her tone became more icy, her smile more forced.

"Surely I pardon it," he replied, collecting himself with an effort, and rising reluctantly in turn.

Then he went away, leaving Camilla restless, unhappy, and dissatisfied with the recent interview.

One door closed, in the stillness of midnight, on Tulip Place; a man crossed the street, and entered the opposite house, and a second portal made a dull echo as he was admitted. The incident was trivial in the daily events of the spot; the results were momentous and unforeseen.

Mrs. Monteith was seated before the library fire, talking with her father. She had just returned from the theatre, and, with her bonnet-strings unfastened, was describing a famous tragedian. When her brother looked at her, the humane impulse to grant her the respite of a night's sleep before she learned the worst news possible for her maternal ear to hear inspired him, as letter and telegram are sometimes withheld by a merciful third person. The blow would crush her. Willy's elopement would prove a true calamity.

"Where is my boy?" demanded the unsuspicious mother. "I have not kissed him to-day."

William decided that further evasion would protract her anxiety, and broke the tidings as gently as possible. Mrs. Monteith read Willy's note with feverish eagerness, and went into hysterics.

Sleep did not visit the St. Nicholas mansion that night. Mr. St. Nicholas was bewildered and unnerved; Mrs. St. Nicholas, aroused from her first slumbers, joined the family group in the library, enveloped in flannel, and tremulous with fright and indignation. The night sheltered a devoted and wronged mother, whose grief was an overwhelming emotion, impossible to allay or reason with by any ordinary measures of condolence.

Mrs. Monteith threw herself on the floor, where she lay, a long, black figure, and beat her head, while wild and frenzied lamentations

escaped her lips. Oh, that the child had never been born! Oh, that her Willy, her darling, had died in his first infantile malady!

"Alice!" reproved her father, distressed and helpless.

Yes, even death were better than being inveigled into a miserable marriage with the French girl. Her parents and brother looked on sympathetically, almost in silence, until the first paroxysm of anger and sorrow should have expended its force, their own dismay overshadowed by Mrs. Monteith's supreme agony. The boy had deceived and outwitted her, his own mother, prompted by the baleful influence of Aimée. She always suspected these demure little minxes, who glide into families as companions, only to lure the sons to ruin. The Belts were to blame. Camilla Belt must have known of the attachment.

"I will never forgive her!" cried the mother, with quivering features and flashing eyes.

William St. Nicholas raised her to her feet, with masculine impatience of scenes.

"Don't be too childish, Alice!" he said, holding her by the arm. "Consider mamma a little."

Mrs. Monteith, thus recalled to her duty, first gave her brother a resentful glance, and then bent over the little shrivelled figure, wrapped in flannels, beside the fire.

"Mamma, you held him on your knee when he was a baby, and now he has run away from us with a—a—" her voice broke, choked with jealousy and passion.

Old Mrs. St. Nicholas sighed, and shook her head, taking the feverish hand of her daughter in her own shrivelled ones. The regret of age, surprised at nothing evil, and perhaps a little doubtful of development of good, contrasted with the fierce despair of Mrs. Monteith.

"His father was like him, you know," she said, ruminatingly, and with a touch of asperity in her harsh voice. "Perhaps you would have eloped together if we had thwarted you, Alice. The girl is a foreign creature, too. Ah me! none of my family, or your father's, ever ran away with a companion—no, no! The other, Camilla Belt, will never marry, mark my words! How does she bear it?"

"She seems to bear it remarkably well," said William St. Nicholas, with animation.

Old Mr. St. Nicholas paced the floor, pale and agitated.

"You are sure the marriage is legal?" he inquired.

His son made no response. Mrs. Monteith started.

"Oh, let us follow them!" she exclaimed, her features haggard in the dawn.

"What is the use?" retorted William, sententiously. "They are married, and they have not given their whereabouts."

Mrs. Monteith sank down into a chair, and burst into tears. She had lost her boy, and all the tears in the world would not restore him to her unchanged. The lovers were fleeing through the hours of darkness, on the train, looking into each other's eyes, whispering confidences without end; Willy radiant and triumphant, Aimée trembling and contrite, yet both ready to brave the unknown future together.

Such were the developments of the night when the musical amateur was to have supped with a celebrated singer. Tulip Place had, indeed, held him captive.

The following noon Camilla Belt received notification from the superintendent of the needlework exhibition that one competitor had been overlooked. Mary Fox had withdrawn her work, a table-cover, before Miss Belt's liberal offer had been made to purchase all the prize articles. If Camilla was inclined to extend the same generosity to Mary Fox, the superintendent would be glad to inform her, as the girl was very poor.

"Yes!" assented Camilla, unhesitatingly.

Two hours later the messenger returned with the information that Mary Fox had refused to accept the money, the table-cover being no longer in her possession. Camilla, shocked and disturbed, reread the two anonymous letters. She paused long over the blurred and badly written sheet.

"I am sure Mary Fox wrote this one," she said aloud.

CHAPTER XV.

MARY FOX, INVENTOR.

"*Bound am I to right the wrong'd.*"—"Gareth and Lynette."

WILLIAM ST. NICHOLAS arose at noon next day, and penned a note of apology to Steinbach. The task accomplished, he read the sheet, and tore it up, with a contemptuous movement of dismissing the matter.

His heart was strangely light and courageous, despite the elopement of his nephew, and the sorrow of his sister. The interview with Camilla Belt, of the past evening, had ameliorated the situation. In his own mind he was disposed to regard the escapade of Willy, the younger, with more than his usual tolerance of the follies of his kind.

He had admired Camilla excessively the previous evening, and liked to consider her interposition, at a critical moment, as that of destiny. The random shaft of her indignation as concerned actresses still tickled his fancy. She believed in the honest affection of a dog. If she could be persuaded of human sincerity as well. He glanced out of his window, hoping to behold her at the opposite casement, but the curtains were closely drawn. Ah, why did not Camilla smile at him across the way, if only in friendly recognition of their interview of the previous night! He could not feel sad in the atmosphere of family gloom, for there was a new and inexplicable joy in his heart, stirring to fresh life and purpose his whole being. He did not venture to question himself as to what the true source of this delight and wonder might be. Had the secret spring existed all these months, and he remained ignorant of the true cause of his irascible moods, despondency, and dissatisfaction with all previous pursuits? His anger had been uncontrollable when he had learned of Camilla's engagement, and yet, withheld by a curious phase of obstinacy, he would not have raised a finger to avert the doom of such separation. He had attended the wedding ceremony inspired by a restless fury of curiosity to note every detail, masked beneath a cynical philosophy of outward demeanor, and had beheld the bride descend the stairway with a sudden coldness of heart impossible to describe. Ah, fool, and blind! he had been bitterly jealous of the

Count Della Stella, for he loved Camilla. Now that he permitted his sober judgment to approve of her course of the previous night, the flame of passion, so long pent up, leaped forth, dazzling and blinding his confused faculties. Yes, he loved Camilla, without reason or premeditation, and he would make her love him, in return, if he could succeed in winning her. He was prepared to wait patiently. His love should remain safely locked in his own breast until such time as she gave him leave to speak. No person must profane by discovering it. He glanced shyly about him as if to judge if the portraits of the musicians grouped on the wall divined the truth, or the instruments would breathe forth in magical harmonies, like the strain of an Æolian harp, the wondrous tale. He reverted to the operetta of the birthday, so ruthlessly discarded, in wrathful mood, and found the fresh charm of wedding-bells in the measure. What would Camilla think of it?

The Belts had learned of Aimée's flight on their return the previous night. The extreme displeasure of Donald Belt led him to write a note to Mr. St. Nicholas at an early hour. Mrs. Belt had remained passive and meditative. Possibly Aimée gained a new interest in the estimation of the older woman, but her sympathy remained hidden, at least in the presence of her stern husband. Since the postponement of Camilla's marriage stepmother and stepdaughter had relapsed into their former relations of mutual indifference. Mrs. Belt had devoted her time once more to the fashions and society. She gave Camilla an enigmatical glance, occasionally, but made no comment on her pastimes.

In the dawn Mrs. Monteith sobbed herself to sleep, with the aid of a sleeping-draught.

At noon Camilla put aside the letter she felt convinced had been written by Mary Fox, to respond to the summons of her father.

"Perhaps we had better call, Camilla," he suggested. "It can do no harm, you know."

"Yes," she replied, with alacrity.

Waiting in passive inaction was alike insupportable to parent and child. Mrs. Monteith could do no more than refuse to receive them. All appearance of complicity in the clandestine marriage of Mademoiselle Rauvier was particularly vexatious to Donald Belt. It would have gone hard with the trembling little bride had she encountered the irritable gleam of the banker's gray eye, just then, as her most inflexible judge. What right had she to entrap the grandson of Mr. St. Nicholas into matrimony? The chances were that Donald Belt would relegate a penniless girl to a far more obscure position, as keeping to her proper sphere, than the injured family on whom she had intruded her unwelcome self. He was most desirous to wash

his hands of Aimée in the presence of the St. Nicholas household, and especially of the aristocratic old gentleman who had dined with him.

Mrs. Monteith excused herself from receiving the Belts. She had attired herself in the deepest mourning, as of one recently bereaved, and remained in the seclusion of her own rooms. Her parents fulfilled the duty with scarcely more satisfactory result. Mr. St. Nicholas turned away, peevishly, from giving some orders to a gardener, concerning his tulips. Mrs. St. Nicholas sat in her accustomed place, with the latest journal unopened on her knee. The family dignity was maintained by the old couple, and froze the intruders with a sense of the utter failure of their mission. Mr. St. Nicholas listened, with frigid politeness, to the explanations and excuses of Donald Belt, and cut short the latter's flow of speech at the precise point where reproaches of Aimée's course would have merged into condolences on the rashness of Willy, with a blank and uncomprehending stare through the icy glimmer of his spectacles. Mrs. St. Nicholas rendered Camilla uncomfortable by her courtesy. The old lady inspected her visitor with interest, and persisted in conversing on irrelevant topics, the church of St. Jerome, the needlework exhibition, the unreasonable weather. There was no possibility of a younger woman's approaching the subject of the elopement, and defending the bride, with this rigid little person, the embodiment of an old-fashioned gentility.

William St. Nicholas exerted himself in vain to render the call agreeable, and was rewarded by a glance of amusement from Camilla, as if she divined his anxiety to conceal the hostility of his relatives. He escorted the Belts to the door, and shook hands with them, infusing unusual warmth into his own manner.

"You were most kind to take the trouble to come," he said, beaming on the nettled Donald Belt, but looking at Camilla. "My sister is not quite herself, you understand. She will be delighted to receive you another day. May I bring you the news, when my graceless nephew again writes?"

"To be sure," assented Donald Belt, heartily.

Camilla made the slightest possible grimace, and averted her face.

William St. Nicholas returned to his parents, slowly rubbing his hands together, and with an expression of countenance that was absolutely sarcastic in ill-humor.

"It must be something new in Miss Belt's experience to be received on sufferance, and especially when her errand is one of kindness," he remarked, in a dry tone.

His father paused in his walk up and down the length of room.

"The girl is well enough," he said, sharply. "We do not need the blundering sympathy of Mammon."

"I am glad to have seen her," chimed in Mrs. St. Nicholas. "She is plain enough, in all conscience, but she has not a bad face. Her chin reminds me of—"

"Mamma, I see a telegraph messenger coming round the corner!" exclaimed her son.

"O Lord! you don't say so, my dear! A telegram always sets me all of a quake and a tremble. It was the despatch from South America that killed your Aunt Harriet, the shock was too much for her, in her delicate state of health."

William St. Nicholas had spoken the truth, for the messenger was already ringing at the door. The despatch was from the bridegroom of a day. Willy had sailed for Europe, from Philadelphia, on a steamship of the Red Star line, and would await reconciliation with his family at Geneva.

The news brought fresh woe to the darkened chamber where Mrs. Monteith had yielded to tragic brooding over the cruel conduct of her petted child, ignoring that his very course might be the natural result of her extravagant maternal indulgence. She had been prepared to send him away, when he came to her door, in suitable contrition of spirit, to beg forgiveness. She had rehearsed an entire line of bearing as regarded wretched and deceitful little Aimée. She was wholly unprepared, however, for the step taken by the lovers in sailing for Europe, and her grief was redoubled, necessitating summoning the family physician. Sorrow, with the tall and pale daughter of the race of St. Nicholas, was not the silent snow of a secret anguish, but rather the overwhelming deluge of a tropical tempest, bringing havoc of distress and disorder to an entire household.

Fain would the brother have escaped, acting on the spur of impulse, from the darkened chamber, the scent-bottles, the shrieks and lamentations of his beloved sister, the prosy condolences of the old people, and carried the telegram to the scarcely less expectant Belts. A volume of explanations surged to his lips in this momentary separation from Camilla. He must see her, and in showing Willy's message do his best to smooth away the unfavorable impression produced by his family during the recent call. Good heavens! Could intercourse with Camilla never be rendered sweet and tranquil? Must there always be some fresh thorn springing up in the pathway between the two houses? Need some cold current of adverse influence always sweep over their two souls at a moment of mutual expansion and softening? He determined to put a stop to these things. The audacious step of Willy, the younger, in marrying

Aimée, was the shuttle binding together such opposite elements as the two families on Tulip Place.

"Alice, pray control yourself," he said, for Mrs. Monteith was clinging to his arm, as she lay on a sofa. "If you can forget your own sufferings for a moment, consider how fearfully you are upsetting mamma."

Mrs. Monteith swept the lace pocket-handkerchief from her disfigured countenance, sat upright, and looked at him with melancholy reproach.

"You do not appreciate the feelings of a mother's heart," she gasped, faintly.

"Very likely not," he retorted.

"William considers that we received Mammon badly just now," said Mr. St. Nicholas, in a captious tone.

His fresh and delicate face appeared pinched and crabbed; he was aggrieved and incensed by the behavior of his grandson, who, indeed, was captivated by a pretty face as he had been at the same age. He was too old to be disturbed by such disagreeable surprises; he had been robbed of his sleep, and his digestion was impaired.

Mrs. Monteith, in one of those changes of mood always possible to a highly strung temperament, ceased to weep, and the ghost of a smile crossed her features.

"You must make my apologies to the Belts, Willy," she said, meekly. "I am sorry they have not been well received."

"I will make it all right with them," he rejoined, reassuringly, and patted her on the shoulder.

When he rang the bell of the opposite house it was only to learn that Camilla had gone out. He was unaccountably dismayed by the intelligence. Why had he not come before? In his perturbation, foiled in the confidences he found it absolutely essential to make as regarded his nephew, he was reluctant to return home, and therefore walked away in an opposite direction.

A cheerful voice greeted him.

"How you are getting on with your music? Eh?"

The speaker was the German Jacob Wertheim, whose house William St. Nicholas was in the habit of frequenting, in the study of counterpoint. The professional musician drew the amateur along with him, while he unfolded to him the scheme of an overture he had just composed on the meeting of the rivers.

"I shall be glad to learn your opinion of my work," said Jacob Wertheim, withdrawing a step, and nodding energetically at his pupil.

The latter accompanied him to the brick house which Camilla had once seen him enter. Here William St. Nicholas was greeted with

much cordiality by Mrs. Wertheim, a buxom and smiling woman, while a flock of little Wertheims embraced the knees of the newcomer with infantile confidence.

The musician seated himself at the piano, in the fluffy little parlor where he gave lessons, shook back his long hair, and soared away on the wing of fancy to the ideal world of his own compositions.

William St. Nicholas paced the floor, listening attentively.

A prelude of heavy notes signified the presence of the sea, while the prevailing harmony emanated from the Rhine, as a tribute on the part of a loyal son of Fatherland.

"It is not too much like Handel's Water Music—eh? Here, my friend, we have the majestic tide of the Mississippi. The pianoforte has not sufficient scope for the subject. We need the entire range of the orchestra, from the deep bass of the sea to the most fairy utterance of the chorus of water-spirits on the first violins. You understand?" The composer swayed his body about, while his thin and flexible fingers traversed the keyboard.

"Are the water-spirits American fairies?" queried the critic, pausing at a window.

Jacob Wertheim shook his head.

"No! No! They must lurk in the shadow of Drachenfels and Bingen," he replied, seriously.

"Why should there not be water-spirits lurking about the bayous, and—snags of the Mississippi, as well, dwelling in friendly communion with the alligators and catfish?" inquired William St. Nicholas.

The musician stared, laughed, and resumed his theme in a rapid and undulatory measure.

"This is the St. Lawrence," he proclaimed, triumphantly.

William St. Nicholas uttered an exclamation of surprise, quickly suppressed. Camilla Belt approached on the other side of the street. She was alone, and entered the house on the corner. What could she be doing over there? He stood there, absorbed in his own meditations, while the Amazon rolled a sonorous measure to join the Rhone and Tiber. He astonished and piqued the composer by demanding, abruptly,

"Who lives in the house on the corner?"

"Several poor families," said the musician, glancing discontentedly over his shoulder.

"Tell me about them," insisted the other.

"Down-stairs there is a shoemaker not quite right in his head," said Mrs. Wertheim, knitting busily. "The first floor is closed, and up-stairs there is the large family."

The sea grumbled a few chords, and William St. Nicholas relapsed into silence, only to resume, later:

"What of this large family, then?"

"The man drinks too much. Himmel! He is gone!" and Fraü Wertheim dropped her ball of wool on the floor, in her surprise.

William St. Nicholas had snatched up his hat, and darted out of the house, without uttering a word of excuse.

The musician rounded his shoulders above his ears, and spread his hands over the keys, like claws, in an attitude of dejection.

"I am sure he finds my symphony like the Handel Water Music," he sighed.

Camilla had quitted the St. Nicholas house holding her head high.

"I wish we had not gone at all," was her comment to her father, accompanied by a flush of resentment.

Later, she went out, without explaining her intentions to any one. She missed Aimée, but she must accustom herself to the loss. Perhaps she, also, accused the bride of ingratitude, in her own mind, as she took her way to the needlework exhibition show-rooms. Why had Mary Fox refused to accept the prize-money? Where did the girl live? She obtained the address without difficulty, and the circumstance that the defrauded competitor dwelt on the very margin of the original Belt estate aroused an additional interest in the quest. Unconscious of the presence of William St. Nicholas in the home of the musician, she had entered the abode of Charles Fox, ascended the stairs to the third story, and knocked on a half-opened door. She remembered the young woman who had once emerged from here.

A boy answered the summons, and stared at her in silence. She recognized the lad who had stood beside her carriage on the night of the concert, and plucked at the shawl of his companion, striving to draw her away. Could Mary Fox have said that all things change?

A girl crouched over the stove in one corner of the room. Her cheeks and hands were burning with fever, while her teeth chattered with cold. She was wrapped in a blanket and bed-cover, for additional warmth.

Two men shared the place with the boy and girl, one very old, and the other middle-aged, shambling, and smelling of whiskey.

Camilla was moved by the squalid poverty of this room, unrelieved by an article of comfort, and unadorned by a single flowering plant. Hope had no place here. She experienced a sort of wonder rather than sympathy. She seemed to have turned her gaze downward to the level of earth, and discovered a new range of objects never before noticed, and the contemplation rendered her thoughtful. Poverty had been a vague term all her life to Joseph Belt's granddaughter.

She had not been educated to think much of the poor. Subscriptions to the contribution-list of well-established charities had been the silken glove wherewith Donald Belt and his family touched grim and unsightly want.

"I wish to see Mary Fox," said Camilla, crossing the threshold, and speaking in her usual clear and resolute tones.

"You can't," retorted the boy Jem, promptly. "She's sick."

"What ails her?" demanded Camilla.

"I don't know," said Jem. "She's stupid, anyhow."

The visitor entered the room, and touched Mary on the shoulder. The two men observed her in wondering silence. Yes; the face was the same.

"You are Mary Fox. Very well. I think you wrote me a letter. Never mind all that, now. I have come to help you," said Camilla, kindly.

Mary, fever-scorched, and shivering in her wraps, contemplated her dreamily.

"What is the good?" she questioned, in a reedy voice.

"You see, ma'am, she's out of sorts, and needs a little doctoring," broke in David Fox, discerning a benefactress. "She's caught cold, likely. A good gal, our Mary, mum."

Charles Fox, with less perspicacity, muttered thickly,

"Be you the dressmaker? Mebbe you owe her more."

Camilla bent over the girl, compassionate, in her own strength, of the feeble and shrinking form.

"You must let me have your table-cover," she continued, in a soothing tone. "I am Miss Belt."

There was a momentary silence in the room. Mary Fox regarded the stranger with the shadow of a frown gathering on her pinched face.

"Joseph Belt's grandchild?" cried David Fox.

"Yes," wonderingly, and a little haughtily.

"Donald Belt's daughter?" stammered Charles Fox.

"Yes," still more wonderingly, as she glanced from one to the other of her interlocutors.

The old man burst into a peal of shrill senile laughter; the younger uttered a coarse oath. The girl Mary, continuing to frown, as if to recall her wandering thoughts, said,

"Go away! We don't need your money. Money! Ah!"

David Fox tottered forward, and clutched the astonished Camilla by the arm, peering into her face, his own features convulsed with excitement, and actually clinging to her for support.

"Joseph Belt's granddaughter. He-he! That's good. So you've come to give us back our own; have ye?"

"What do you call your own?" asked Camilla, shaking herself free of his touch, with a shudder of repulsion.

"Show her our bit of land from the winder, boy," he hissed and mumbled, supporting himself against the wall, and continuing to glare at Camilla, with impotent and malevolent rage.

His passion kindled the anger of his son, as a torch may ignite a heap of loose hemp.

"That's ours, every foot of it," added Charles Fox, in a kind of snarl, while a dangerous gleam came into his bloodshot eyes.

He indicated the buildings of the Belt property with a large and unsteady hand.

Camilla turned to Mary Fox again. She was not going to betray a cowardly fear of these men. She did not clearly understand their wrongs, and found them evil, ignoble, hideous.

"My grandfather acted as he thought best, in his day," she said. "Your daughter needs a doctor, and must go to bed."

Charles Fox gave vent to another oath which made the boy Jem start uneasily.

"You roll in gold while my girl pinches, slaves, and starves!" he shouted, transported by fury at her coolness. "Curse you! I'll teach Joseph Belt's spawn to come spyin' in on us, and payin' the hush-money to their conscience of a little charity."

Camilla stood erect and undaunted before the infuriated man. Could he mean to strike her?

At this moment the door was flung open, and William St. Nicholas appeared. He pushed Charles Fox aside, and approached her quickly.

"I will teach you to touch Miss Belt, you dog!" he said, in a low tone of menace.

These changes occurred so swiftly that Camilla had no leisure to realize her danger before it was over. She had walked into the jaws of peril without being aware of it; her errand one of charity. She was more amazed and perplexed than terrified.

The entrance of William St. Nicholas aroused Mary Fox from the torpor that was rapidly stealing over and benumbing her faculties. She looked at him steadily, and a smile of ineffable sweetness dawned on her wasted features. The saints and martyrs of ancient Christian art, who lift their gaze from the ignoble strife of life about them to the vision of some cloud-horizon, have the same expression of wistful and wondering contemplation.

"Jem; that's him," she whispered.

The boy Jem, sulky and indifferent to all else, understood.

William St. Nicholas did not once glance at her. He drew Camilla away, intent only on her safety.

"In the name of Heaven what are you doing here?" he exclaimed, when they were outside, and descending the narrow stairway together.

He looked at his companion anxiously, to ascertain if she had suffered any stain from contact with the Fox abode. Camilla's mouth acquired its most whimsical curve.

"I came to buy a table-cover, and I mean to have it yet. First, we must call a doctor for that poor girl. I want the boy to come with us, please."

"Camilla! What right had you to risk coming alone to this den?" He made the demand impetuously, imperiously, pausing before her in the narrow hall.

Her face changed; a little quiver of emotion swept over her features, as if in response to his change of tone.

"I must have known that you were near," she whispered, raising her eyes to his.

What a noble face was that of William St. Nicholas, as seen in the mean and dark hall, strong and tender in solicitude for her safety, and eloquent of something more which made her heart tremble in her breast with an incredulous joy, almost akin to awe.

They stood there, for a time, face to face, soul meeting soul, in swift recognition, and because the thoughts of William St. Nicholas had surged within brain and breast all day, when opportunity for speech came his lips were dumb.

Poor, dazed Charles Fox had spoken truth. For the girl above-stairs, pain, trouble, fruitless labor, soured by the disheartening family discontent; for the girl pausing in the narrow hall below, joy, protection, and love. All for one, and none of life's blessings for the other.

"Please call the boy," repeated Camilla.

Jem appeared with alacrity. He knew the store where the table-cover had been sold, and volunteered further information about the pawn-ticket for Mary's sewing-machine. The family pride was sadly diluted with Jem. The prejudice which had led Mary to thrust aside the helping hand extended to her, because it belonged to Camilla Belt, found no echo in the hungry greed of the boy. Camilla sent him back for the pawn-ticket.

"Did you ever visit a pawnbroker?" she inquired of her companion.

"No. Allow me to go with Jem," he entreated.

Camilla shook her head.

"I have wronged this poor girl. I should like to see a pawnbroker with my own eyes."

The table-cover was found, and purchased, to the manifest relief

of a philanthropical shopwoman. Camilla gave a duplicate sum to Jem, who stowed it away in his pocket. Next they sought a dirty and noisy street, and Jem enlivened the walk by talking about his sister. Mary was always making things, with bits of wood and wire, just like a boy. She had something in a box, now, to move looms. Camilla and William looked at each other.

"She must be an inventor," he said.

The pawnbroker welcomed them to his kingdom, as a student of human nature, disposed to scepticism as to the object of their visit. He was a dusky man, who seemed to have acquired coloring from his surroundings, the wreck of poor households, the odds-and-ends of bankrupt merchants, the harvest of gambling dens and bar-rooms. Callous to despair, and indifferent to human misery, no amount of imagination in Camilla could render him other than he was—the New World equivalent for the London "my uncle," and the Parisian "ma tante." The sewing-machine was still there, but the pawnbroker opined the lady and gentleman were tracing some stolen object, or in pursuit of the pledged chronometer of the scapegrace of their family. He had received such calls before.

Camilla placed her hand on the article, and, stooping over it, read the name engraved on the plate,

"The Belt Sewing-Machine Co."

The blood rushed to her brow. She redeemed the machine, and sent it back to the owner. Jem was dismissed, with further instructions as to the physician and care of Mary Fox, who had been apathetic ever since the rejection of her work by the prize competition.

The weather had changed, and the rain was falling. Camilla refused to have a carriage ordered, or to avail herself of a public conveyance in regaining Tulip Place. She opened her own little umbrella, and declined the shelter of her companion's larger one.

"My grandfather invented that machine, Mr. St. Nicholas," she said, mockingly. "Perhaps you have heard of the fact before. I think it my duty to adopt the machine. My crest shall be a shuttle rampant, and a needle volant in argent, with a monogram, in a chaplet of encircling roses."

He made no response. They were in sight of Tulip Place, and as they crossed a wide thoroughfare the wind wrenched away Camilla's toy umbrella, completely reversing it. The rain, charged with hail and sleet, swept in a cloud around the corner, rendering their footing difficult.

"Perhaps you will consent to share my umbrella now," said William St. Nicholas, with quiet authority, and drew her to his side, placing her hand within his arm. "United we stand."

"And divided we certainly fall," she added, laughing, and bending her head before the blast.

Oh, delicious and unforeseen opportunity! A sudden thrill of delight swept over the soul of William St. Nicholas, a longing to speak, and be understood by the one woman in the world who existed for him.

"Camilla, I love you," he whispered, eagerly, pausing there in the shelter of the umbrella. "I must have always loved you, without knowing it, but you should have known. They say a woman is never deceived in such matters. Oh, Camilla, what right had you—"

"Hush!" she interposed, with a pale face, and the look in her eyes, turned on him, for a moment, checked the torrent of passion rising to his lips.

Pain was awakened in her heart by the change in him. She asked herself, with a benumbing sense of loss and regret, how she was to have known William St. Nicholas cared for her. She saw in the whirling mist of rain and snow, obscuring Tulip Place, the ghost of another day, the mocking wedding-guests not gathered to do him honor, a bride with hands outstretched to grasp emptiness, a little page who sulked because there was no fun. The man beside her was noble, good, and would cast the mantle of his own magnanimous protection over that pitiable and shameful past, even as he had shielded her to-day. He was worthy of better things. Her whole nature was abashed, humiliated, wrung by the torture of listening to him.

Mistaking her silence, in his own agitation, he bent over her.

"Say one word to me before we part. I will be patient. I will wait, until you give me leave to speak, only I must have all or nothing, Camilla."

"Nothing, then," replied Camilla, gazing straight before her, and the sleet swept in a cold gust in her face, as the phantom wedding-guests fled away down the length of Tulip Place, leaving the bride mute, white, and desolate.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HORSE, SULTAN.

"*A steed to fear.*"

One week later the sun rose in unclouded splendor over the city of New York, dispersing the early vapors of dawn, and causing the casements of adjacent towns to sparkle across an intervening space of waters. The world had once more awakened to labor and rejoice, to suffer and despair, all in the span of man's little hour of strength.

In Tulip Place the spaniel Turco, strolling about the premises, looked in on the horses with the amicable bearing often observable among quadrupeds. The stables of Donald Belt were admirably built and well appointed. The new horse, Sultan, recently purchased by the master, fretting at the restraints imposed on fiery temperament and vicious instincts by the narrow limits of stall, turned his graceful neck to gaze at the dog.

Within doors Mrs. Belt considered the resetting of some diamond stars, with her head held slightly on one side, and the brightness in her eyes which the sight of jewels only evoked. It was a strange and cruel light, coming and going fitfully. She loved her gems, and would gaze for hours at the rosy sparkles smitten from brilliant and ruby by the sunshine, as if lost in some intoxicating reverie, or half fiercely and defiantly, as one who grasped some evanescent satisfaction from possession.

Camilla went about listlessly, with a pale and preoccupied bearing. In the morning her face was worn, as if from late vigils. Was it possible she still brooded over the departure of the Count Della Stella? The stepmother pondered over Camilla's altered mien. She had written to the count, and received a reply couched in the language of a poetical despair. Again Mrs. Belt had been moved to indite a guarded missive, holding forth the hope of making a journey to Europe at no distant date, when they might again meet. To this last communication there had been no response. Mrs. Belt was puzzled, affronted, and a little frightened. She dreaded that the tiny wax taper of her own indiscretion might have kindled some vast conflagration beyond the limit of her ken.

Camilla gave no sign, and yet she was troubled, elated, and doubtful in a breath. At times her face grew tender, as, in soft reveries, her heart went out to the neighbor across the street in fullest acknowledgment of his claim upon her fidelity and devotion. Then her nature recoiled upon itself, and suspicion awoke to torment her dreams. She had passed him by before all the world, her eyes blinded, her senses dulled by pride and vanity. She had preferred a carpet-knight of the ballroom. Was William St. Nicholas a man to wait humbly in the gate? She shook her head and sighed, repenting the rashness of her folly. It was too late! Yet he had always cared for her. Marvellous revelation!

Relations with the St. Nicholas household remained unchanged. Mrs. Monteith refused to see Camilla Belt, but began to evince interest in sending messages to her by her brother. The latter acquitted himself creditably of the mission, as well as the duty of looking after Mary Fox in her illness. Did he take any undue advantage of these claims on a mutual interest to frequent Mrs. Belt's little boudoir, charming that lady by his affability? Did the secret, not suffered to escape the barrier of his lips, flame from his eyes, piercing the senses of Camilla like a lightning flash, and setting her pulses throbbing as no man had ever stirred them? Donald Belt detained the younger St. Nicholas to dinner, and was surprised to find how exactly their ideas agreed on politics and the turf. What more suitable than that the daughter of the house should stroll through picture-gallery and conservatory with the guest afterwards, when, in the intervals of discussing Mary Fox and her invention, the blended fragrance of the flowers and the musical drip of the fountain seemed to speak for both? This was life!

Mrs. Monteith reclined on her sofa, with a handkerchief, delicately scented, spread over her face. A state of invalidism was inseparable to her grief over the marriage of her son, and she still remained in her own rooms. Each morning she electrified her family by her nightmare visions of the night, when she saw her boy at the mercy of the sea, now among icebergs, and again a prey to marine monsters. The safety of pretty Aimée did not concern her maternal bosom.

"Did you dine with the Belts last night, Willy?" she inquired of her brother, in languid tones.

"Yes," he replied, with marked animation.

"Of course there can be no news yet. You must act as you see fit, but I never intend to resume intercourse with the Belts."

"My dear Alice! you cannot be in earnest," he exclaimed, in unfeigned consternation.

"Associations would be too painful," sighed Mrs. Monteith, but

she looked at him covertly, from behind her handkerchief, to note the effect of her words.

He uttered an ejaculation of indignant protestation, then paused, as if a prey to some embarrassment, and joined his father at the window.

The horse Sultan had paused before the opposite house, attached to a light trotting-wagon with yellow wheels, and a seat in the rear for the attendant groom. The superb animal, symmetrical in form, with small head, sinewy flank, and slender, nervous limbs, dropped foam on his sleek gray coat, from the curbing bit, and pawed the pavement in his impatience to take the road.

"That is a devil of a horse," commented old Mr. St. Nicholas. "Where did Donald Belt find him, I wonder."

"Blue Grass, with a strain of Arab blood, I should say," responded William, abstractedly.

He was not intent on admiring the fine points of Sultan, nor in speculating on the animal's pedigree. He was angered by his sister's caprice of dislike to the Belts, and wondering if the sentiment were worthy of notice. Of course his own preference was an unfathomed spring, safe in his breast, and wholly unsuspected by his family.

Tulip Place long remembered the issuing forth of Donald Belt, hale and florid in his vigorous maturity, pausing on the curbstone to draw on his gloves and make some criticism on the harness. Every detail of gathering up reins and whip, and the springing off of Sultan at a long, swinging pace, acquired importance in reminiscence.

The bays of William St. Nicholas were drawn up at the same moment, and as he drove away, at a far more leisurely pace, his conscience reproached him in the matter of having quitted Jacob Wertheim, in the midst of the symphony of the rivers, without a word of apology.

"Poor fellow! I forgot all about him. I will take him to drive, and we will discuss publishing the music," he soliloquized, turning in the direction of the Hudson River.

Life and death were abroad in the town, moving hand in hand.

As William St. Nicholas approached the familiar locality, a humble funeral was quitting the shabby brick house on the corner. Mary Fox had entered upon her rest, her pillow smoothed by the awkward yet affectionate touch of the boy Jem, and the ceaseless prayer of her fevered brain having been the petition, "Give the box to him, Jem, and never to her."

Mr. St. Nicholas checked his horses with genuine contrition.

"I forgot her, too," he murmured. "God forgive me! The doc-

tor sent word last night that she was sinking fast. Poor girl! She needed nothing, and why should Camilla be needlessly distressed? Surely Mary Fox was nothing to her."

The fever of a few days attacking the brain; work, exposure, insufficient food and clothing, borne without complaint. Such was the verdict of medical skill, the neighbors, maudlin Charles Fox; but surely there was something more, a moment when expiring hope admitted disease without resistance, possibly as a deliverer.

All for the girl in Tulip Place and nothing for the other, cradled on the margin of the Belt property, and forced to contemplate her family's wrong for her entire span of existence. Stay! All for Camilla?

The horse Sultan was traversing the avenues of the Park, now moving with the rapidity of an arrow and again stepping slowly, nostril quivering and eye glancing from side to side, starting at his own shadow. Was there another shadow keeping pace with the equipage, and first recognized by the keener animal instinct?

Donald Belt experienced an exhilarating sense of power in guiding the restive steed, and accustoming him to soothing words and a firm will. The nervous restlessness of Sultan tantalized and piqued him. He longed to mount the animal and dominate equine caprice by means of spur and bit. A stretch of level white road beyond town limits tempted the master to expend the fiery mettle of Sultan. A vagrant crouched in the hedge, binding up his bruised foot with a rag, and cursing the stones of the highway where he had limped many miles, a creature, outcast of the town, and repulsed in turn by the country, brutalized, wretched, ignorant, yet having his uses.

William St. Nicholas, reining up before the door of the neglected musical genius, was surprised by the sudden approach of the boy Jem, who thrust a small box into the gentleman's hand and darted away again without a word.

Jacob Wertheim clambered into the carriage, and consented to converse about the river symphony, in token of forgiveness, as they drove away in the direction of the Park. William St. Nicholas evinced his remorse by urging an immediate publication of the work, when it should be performed at the musical club of which he was president. Jacob Wertheim grasped his hand and beamed on him through his spectacles. Whereupon the amateur, with becoming modesty, broached the subject, in turn, of his operetta of the birthday, a communication received by Herr Wertheim with none the less sympathy that he doubted the capacity of the composer.

"Love works miracles, however, and I perceive our friend here has fallen in love," thought the disciple of Sebastian Bach.

On the white and level road the vagrant glanced up and beheld Sultan stepping towards him at a gingerly pace, shining wheels revolving slowly, Donald Belt gazing down on his brother of the dust from his high seat, the attendant groom perched behind, with folded arms and supercilious mien, after the manner of his class.

The vagrant scowled beneath his shock of matted hair, then grinned. A diabolical impulse prompted him to bring low the pride and strength of Donald Belt, a man whom he did not know, yet hated with an unreasoning ferocity.

"Hey, my beauty!" he shouted, and waved his ragged boot in the air.

Down by the hedge a squat form, half human and half bestial, unfamiliar to Sultan's ken; and sudden movement, the stretching forth of a misshapen member, boot uppermost; all this sufficed for the destined end. The horse snorted, swerved, bolted.

There was a startled exclamation from the master, a cry from the groom, then a wild rush of flying hoofs and streaming mane, as Sultan, maddened by his own liberty, bounded forward, holding the bit between his teeth. Ruin followed swiftly in the wake of elegant symmetry on the level road; the light wagon swayed from side to side in the train of the horse, then fell, with wreck of broken shafts and wheels scattered far. The groom, hurled to a distance, lay motionless in the ditch, while Donald Belt, with the reins wound tightly about his hands and wrists, was dragged at the heels of Sultan, the leather bonds by which he had sought to guide and restrain proving his own destruction, until, spurned in turn, he remained extended on the highway, an inert mass.

The vagrant rose and slouched after, pouncing on the prostrate form of Donald Belt with the instinct of a bird of prey, and proceeding to rifle him of watch and coin.

"Ay; lie there, my man!" he muttered, spurning the millionaire with his foot, and gloating over the unexpected booty.

William St. Nicholas and Jacob Wertheim were approaching from an opposite direction at a leisurely pace, conversing together in amicable vein about the divine Mozart, the fiery Liszt, the mighty Meyerbeer. They had gained the level stretch of white road without taking too much heed of their surroundings in the absorption of a favorite subject, when they became aware of a flying horse coming towards them, dragging a man, entangled in the reins and harness, at his heels.

"Good God!" ejaculated William St. Nicholas, with some swift premonition of the man's identity.

"Gott in Himmel!" echoed Jacob Wertheim.

Then both were silent, awaiting a shock which seemed inevitable.

The bays snorted and plunged, trembling in every limb, as if scenting the frenzy of that comrade whose hoofs beat the ground with frightful regularity and rapidity, as he swept down upon them, shedding some fresh fragment of the *débris* of his trappings at every step. On and on came the thunder of the beating hoofs, and the very air seemed hushed to listen, the twigs of the hedges to whistle in the flight of that bounding shape, panting, quivering, but spurred forward by fear of the creature lurking under the bushes, to mock and flout with hoarse cries.

For a moment the occupants of the other carriage were forced to contemplate the magnificent spectacle of the horse in a wild state, untrammelled by guidance, fit bearer of the gods on earthly errand intent, or of the mystic brothers twain, eyes launching flames, and nostril expanded to snuff the breeze of fresh danger; then the man was cast aside in the road, and Sultan, rushing onward, came in sharp collision with the bays, pierced his foaming breast with the pole of the vehicle, and fell.

William St. Nicholas had sprung out of the carriage and hastened to the aid of the fallen man. He did not heed the dragging down of one of the bays by the rude shock of Sultan's approach, and he scarcely saw the tramp, for he was intent on raising the head of Donald Belt.

The vagrant hobbled off, but his triumph was short-lived, for swift justice overtook him in the form of a suspicious policeman.

An accident, or the perpetration of a crime, draws humanity together to gaze, wonder, and gossip, with such magical swiftness as to suggest rising through the ground. Thus William St. Nicholas was speedily surrounded by an ever-increasing crowd as he knelt in the road, aided by Jacob Wertheim, and supported the head of Donald Belt, until such time as suitable conveyance could be obtained, and medical judgment pronounce that the master still lived, while the groom was dead.

The afternoon was wearing to a close when Camilla entered the room where Mrs. Belt was seated, matching some startling colors with her own complexion, in morsels of silk and velvet sent to her by a Parisian *modiste*. New colors interested Mrs. Belt, and whether copper-green, the hue of a boiled lobster, or of a crushed strawberry, she was moved to experiment, and meditation as to results.

Camilla had been talking with a boy in the hall who had begged to see her. Jem, dazed and still sobbing, the house strangely empty and void at home, now that all was over, had obeyed the impulse of seeking Miss Belt and communicating the tidings of Mary's funeral, purposely withheld by William St. Nicholas. Camilla had com-

forted the boy as best she could, and told him to bring her the sewing-machine. She wished to own it.

"I am going to take care of that family," she said, moving about the room with her hands clasped. "The old man would be better off in some home for the aged, and the boys must be separated from their drunken father. Jem should learn a trade, and the younger boy go to school in the country."

She approached the chimney-piece, glanced at the clock, and added, thoughtfully,

"Father is late."

The clock struck, and the last silvery chime died away in silence. A cold shadow crept into the room, felt simultaneously by the two women. They looked at each other. Mrs. Belt rose to her feet, scattering the bright silks on the floor. Her face became blanched and ghastly, she pressed her hands to her breast and cast a startled glance about her.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried, in a piercing voice.

Why did Camilla spring to her side and reply?

"Don't be frightened, mamma," she whispered, passing her arm around the shrinking figure.

William St. Nicholas stood in the door, and outside, in the street, there was noise, confusion, and the slow, jolting rumble of heavy wheels that paused.

Camilla steadied her fainting pulses and sinking heart by an effort, and extended her hand.

"What has happened?" her white lips framed the question, mechanically.

"There has been an accident on the road," he replied, quietly. "Pray calm your apprehensions, ladies. The matter might be worse."

"Yes," said Camilla. "The horse Sultan. I know."

Mrs. Belt cowered in an arm-chair with a convulsive sob of terror, and hid her face in her hands. Camilla went out to the entrance-door to meet her father. William St. Nicholas and the others made way for the daughter of the house, after one glance at her resolute face.

It was the rumor of this home-coming which had reached the soul rather than the ear of the wife, in some swift and sickening presentiment of evil.

Tulip Place knew that the vigorous man of the noonday was being brought home a shapeless heap of crushed humanity. Tulip Place knew that the horse Sultan would never return, having been shot after he fell pierced by the pole of the St. Nicholas carriage. That which Tulip Place did not perceive, as belonging to the ele-

ment of insignificance, was a vagrant in a prison cell, deprived of his plunder, the watch and chain, yet hugging his rags in the darkness, with hoarse laughter at the work he had done. Were not those two supperless as well as he? Only those powers of good and evil, God and Devil, witnessed the conflict of the prison cell, and gave no sign.

In the Belt mansion dismayed faces peered in every door, and the movement of grave physicians, solicitous friends, and flurried servants pervaded every room. Already the pavement of the street had disappeared beneath the muffling cover of tan, while the hushed stillness of the interior contrasted strangely with the cautious celerity of flying messengers, doing the bidding of William St. Nicholas, whose authority was absolute. Then came the terrible suspense of waiting, while the doctors gathered about the couch of the insensible man, and doors were closed. Camilla, waiting on the landing, was aware of some movement in the hall below. The voice of William St. Nicholas said, with marked impatience,

"This is no time for such folly. Take it away again."

Camilla dragged herself to the spot. The light of the great tulip-shaped hall lamp flickered on Mary Fox's sewing-machine. Camilla looked at it with a wild impulse to laugh and to weep, but the sound died away in her throat.

"Leave it," she said, to the defiant Jem.

Did Mary Fox, in some shadow of the invisible border-land, witness the scene?

"Surely she would think it my turn," mused Camilla; and, retracing her steps, resumed her weary vigil, waiting outside her father's door, where the dog Turco came and licked her cheek.

Oh, the anguish of the waiting! When midnight struck the moments seemed to have stretched to years since Donald Belt came home. In the bed lay a twisted shape, and Mrs. Belt stood on one side of the couch, while Camilla occupied the other.

"Camilla, never marry unless you love your husband," sighed Mrs. Belt, her voice the merest echo of the silent chamber.

Camilla glanced at her stepmother, with a slight shudder.

"No! oh, no!" she answered.

"I have hated him," continued the older woman, pointing to the still insensible man extended between them. "He has given me everything I craved in my silly vanity, and, O God! how I have hated him!"

William St. Nicholas entered the room, approached Camilla, and took her hand. She looked at him in an agony of appeal.

"Is he going to die?" her eyes repeated the question of her dry lips.

He shook his head reassuringly.

"The doctors hope he may survive."

The pallor of her face deepened, and Camilla fell, fainting, at his feet. He raised and held her closely in his embrace.

Such was their betrothal, as life and death passed hand in hand through the crowded ranks of the town.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE SPRINGTIME.

"O we will walk this world
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so through those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows."—"The Princess."

"ANOTHER spring! I have lived to see the leaves again come out, and the flowers once more bloom," said old Mrs. St. Nicholas, seated in the window of her morning-room, newspaper in hand.

She spoke with the same contentment which characterizes the housewife of North Germany and Denmark when the stork returns from his winter flight to the warm countries, to build a nest on the chimney.

The magnolia had opened its snowy chalice in the adjacent courtyard, the purple wisteria spread clusters of blossoms over the iron trellis of the balcony of the house of the watcher, whose pale face was visible at the casement; and down the length of street the square where William St. Nicholas had rescued the emigrants on a bleak winter day was now an oasis of tender green foliage, set in the midst of the bricks and mortar of the town.

Then Mrs. St. Nicholas would put on her bonnet, with the brisk announcement:

"I will just step over and inquire what Mr. Belt thinks of the news from China this morning."

The chances were she would meet her husband, intent on the same errand, with one of his finest tulips cut to show the invalid.

The tan had been removed from the street, and the casements of the Belt mansion were again open to the sunlight. Donald Belt had survived the accident, but it was to be henceforth helpless and fractured, cut off from active life, with twisted and useless limbs, tended by his wife. His daughter he could spare, but the eye of the sick man sought constantly the presence of his wife, as reader, nurse, attendant; and she yielded to, nay, eagerly anticipated, every whim. Old Mrs. St. Nicholas, more than any other, held the clew to this remorseful devotion, and turned a fresh page in the history of Tulip Place, half confessed by Mrs. Belt, and half divined by her mature

sympathy. The vision of the past was the beautiful niece of the rough tavern-keeper, where Donald Belt stopped over-night, a girl disdainful of her surroundings, by reason of the marvellous tales told by her own looking-glass, and only half responsive to the mad passion of the handsome blacksmith she was to marry on the morrow. There had been no temptation of dazzling flattery, for Donald Belt had not known she was under the same roof, while she had looked and listened, then matured her scheme, seated on the garret stair, while all the house slept. This man could give her wealth and ease, her beauty would shine resplendent if he willed it so. In the dawn she followed a path through the woods to the next station of the railroad, and when Donald Belt was on the train she had risked all to touch him on the shoulder, and murmur some wish to sit beside him, not liking the manners of her companion in the car. Donald Belt had turned his head, and looked up into the pure face and starry eyes which had so often puzzled other observers since by their surface softness of appealing timidity and latent depths of audacity. The moment was a critical one. He was returning to the renewed admonitions of his father to again marry. What if he brought back a bride? The sequel should have been brilliant, and was not. The babies had died, the husband's admiration cooled, and in the background had lurked a threatening shape of revenge—the injured lover, taken to drink at the tavern where first he had seen her, and promising to search the country over to find her. In what form? The hair of Camilla's stepmother had grown white in the suspense of watching for this dreaded fulfilment. Did he still live? Had he died? She dared not ask or seek, while a fancied resemblance, even now, would make her blanch and tremble. Too weak to sustain the power which she had grasped, she was equally unable to retract, and thus lived, counting feverishly her jewels, uncertain, irresolute, and defiant of fate.

Tulip Place indulged in criticism of the attitude of the old couple, finding the engagement of William and Camilla ample reason for their interest in the opposite house. In reality the accident of Donald Belt had far more influence on both at the time.

Easter had been duly celebrated at the church of St. Jerome, where the pensive assistant acquired fresh interest in the eyes of the feminine portion of the congregation by being announced to have a leaning towards the doctrine of Molinos, the Quietist, and Rome.

Professor Vincent Ashwell had returned to England, charmed with his visit to America. Colonel Crosbie Ellery King had been ruthlessly banished, by an inexorable executive, to a western fort, and Captain Rawdon to the South Pacific. Samuel Hardinge, jilted by the Myosotis maiden of Camilla's flower ball, was making ar-

rangements to enlarge the Bachelors' Club, and was understood to disapprove of the elopement of Willy Monteith even more than the young gentleman's mother.

Mrs. Monteith, during the period of her temporary withdrawal from society, had found relief in wielding again her pen, not, indeed, in the field of sentimental fiction, but in satire of a withering power. Willy had announced his intention of becoming a teacher of languages at Geneva, if his mother did not fully accord him permission to present Aimée in Tulip Place. Mrs. Monteith's reply must have been of an unsatisfactory nature, for his next letter developed a plan of retiring to a *châlet* in the high Alps, and tending the herds of a cheese farm. The devoted mother cast aside her pen, which was involving her in a controversy on a social question, and took the next steamer for Europe, as bearer, in person, of the olive-branch of peace.

In the springtime Fanny Hopper appeared as a radiant vision of youthful freshness, in the lilac dress alone rendered possible by Camilla's prize-money. The young lady manifested extraordinary reluctance about accepting the payment.

"I have said and done such mean things about the gold Madonna," she demurred.

"That was only natural," affirmed the sisters.

Frances yielded to the verdict of the family, donned the new dress, and was so wondrous a picture of bloom and rosebuds, coming from church, that the little son of Mr. Black, the widower, dwelling in the double house at the corner, tripped on the curbstone and fell, all for gazing at her; a situation of peril from which she rescued him just in time to receive the thanks of his gloomy and abstracted parent. From that date Mr. Black began to notice Fanny, quite irrespective of her raiment; and, although he subsequently confessed that he had secretly admired her for a long time, she cherished the conviction that the lilac frock had advertised her attractions on the auspicious occasion of a first meeting.

"I shall bless Miss Belt to my dying day," exclaimed the girl, with enthusiasm.

"I don't see how she could have done less than buy the other things," said Mrs. Hopper, in regretful remembrance of the front breadth of her own wedding-gown.

Still there was rejoicing over the good-fortune of the blooming Fanny on the Hopper hearthstone.

In the springtime grass and flowers bloomed above the grave of Mary Fox, in the quiet cemetery, where the dimpling shadow of passing clouds and the note of birds breathed only of peace and rest.

Old Mr. St. Nicholas, tulip in hand, had said to his wife:

"I suppose they had better be married in Donald Belt's room."

"I suppose so," she had assented. "William has made up his mind, and we have no right to oppose him."

Mr. St. Nicholas eyed the broad and spacious mansion opposite.

"I intend to interest Camilla in my mission school," he said.

Camilla met William, and presented him with a little *mouchoir* case, neatly stitched by her, on the machine of her grandfather's invention. He was vexed, but controlled his annoyance.

"It seems to me I have the most pride of the two, Mr. St. Nicholas," said Camilla, laughing.

Laughter was rare in that wooing, where closest sympathy had been established in the darkened chamber of Donald Belt.

"There need be no question of pride between us," he said, looking down on her with the light shining in his eyes which always drew her to his side, subdued and tender. "They think we might be married in the presence of your father, and go away for a time."

Camilla raised her face to his, yearningly.

"You have been the master of the house for a long time, Willy," she said, tremulously. "What a twilight courtship we have had!"

"A blessed twilight," he answered, and kissed her.

In the ensuing month of June William St. Nicholas returned to his hotel in Paris, from the bank in the Rue Scribe, with a number of letters in his hand. He found his wife intent on collecting some books for the library of Mr. St. Nicholas.

"I hope these will please him," she said, indicating a copy of the "Memoirs of Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully," adorned with the arms of Louis XV., a royal-printing-office edition of La Rochefoucauld's "Maxims," and a volume of the old poet, Clément Marot.

"Alice sends us a fresh shower of blessings from London, and I think she intends joining Professor Ashwell in Norway, with a party of enthusiastic Yankees," said William St. Nicholas, opening his first letter; "she declares the Engadine is an old story. Camilla, she says, the conceited creature! that she always hoped and prayed we should fall in love with each other. She saw it all from the first, and she is beginning to be reconciled to sacrificing her Willy for such a result. There is magnanimity for you!"

"Perhaps she will be more reconciled when she learns of our scheme to furnish a little house for those children, not far from Tulip Place, and enter her son as clerk in the Belt Bank," suggested the practical Camilla. "I intend to give Aimée half of my store of cushions and screens from the needlework exhibition."

"Do you know, they are beginning to speak of the Fox patent at home," added William, turning to fresh envelopes. "I must act as

guardian to those boys. Jacob Wertheim is quite jolly about his river symphony, and threatens to perform my operetta of the Birthday as well, but I think we will keep that for private enjoyment."

The newly wedded pair entered upon an animated discussion of future projects, which lasted through the breakfast, and up to the hour for driving in the Bois. Camilla insisted that William wished to establish a hospital for decrepit musicians, where the spit of the kitchen must be set to melody, like that of the Count Castel de Marin, capable of roasting mutton *à l'Anglaise*, or fowl *à la Flamande*, all to appropriate airs. He retaliated by accusing her of dreaming of an elysium for sewing-machine operatives, the like of which had not yet dawned on the mind of the philanthropist.

June sunshine smiled on Paris that day, and all the world was abroad. A file of glittering equipages traversed the Champs Elysées, and swept into the Bois beyond.

The Steinbach, enveloped in a mantle of golden brocade, passed, and glanced at them beneath her veil.

"I believe that I was jealous of that singer at the concert," said Camilla, with sudden conviction. "Had I reason, dear?"

"You had no reason," he replied, sedately.

"The *modiste* has just sent me an odd little hat called the Steinbach," added Camilla, with her most whimsical expression.

"Do not wear it," he said, in a dry tone.

Skirting the lake they met a second carriage, in which were seated the Count Della Stella and a lady. The count, handsome, joyous, and elegant, bore no trace of having ever suffered an hour's trouble in his life, or of having lost a hair of his now abundant mustache. The lady at his side was Miss Pyle, now Countess Della Stella, and some time to become lady-in-waiting at the Quirinal Palace. Her mignonne prettiness was enhanced by a charming toilet of cream-colored lace, with tunic and bodice of blue satin, adorned with peacock feathers, while the jewelled bird seemed to crown her blonde hair with audacious coquetry. The two gentlemen raised their hats; the ladies bowed.

"My angel, you may remember that I was to marry Miss Belt," said the count, touching, with a caressing gesture, the cream-colored glove of his gay little bride. "I allowed the barber to deprive me of my mustache on my wedding-morning. Surely you knew the reason? No? I had met you at the ball."

The bride curved her neck with a little birdlike motion. Had not her flower garland caught in his cloak? "For that reason you followed me to Milan when you landed at Genoa. Yes, I know," she replied, complacently.

"Insipid as the queen upon a card;
Her all of thought and bearing hardly more
Than his own shadow in a sickly sun."

The count twisted his mustache. He had seen Camilla again. Did he care? Columbus had sought a passage to the Indies, and found the tropical islands of America instead.

The little contessa, already intensely aristocratic, and desirous to maintain the family honor, adjusted her bracelets, and dreamed of the future before her.

William St. Nicholas was silent. Camilla compressed her lips. They had met and parted on one of the world's highways, like ships upon the sea.

At length she questioned, abruptly:

"Did you ever admire the relic of the Genoa cathedral, the *sacro catino*, the emerald dish from which Christ ate at the Last Supper, once given to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba?"

"I may have seen it," admitted her husband, quietly.

"Napoleon discovered it was only a bit of old Venetian glass," she supplemented, with bitterness.

"There's a good deal of green glass lying scattered about. Nothing is true except—"

"Well? Except—"

"Music."

"Ah, music!"

"Music and Camilla."

She turned to him with sudden passion.

"Willy, I wish I could ever tell you how much I love you. And how sorry I am—I mean—"

He laid his hand on her's with a reassuring pressure.

"Camilla, if you have finished with Paris, let us go back," he said.

They turned their faces homeward, where a cripple sat in a wheeled chair, with a beautiful woman beside him who had never known happiness, but had now found peace, and a dog watched on the threshold for their footsteps as summer came once more to Tulip Place.

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